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# **Precarious Lives, Practices and Spaces: An Investigation into Homelessness and Alternative Uses of Public Space**

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# Abstract

The aim of this doctoral thesis is to investigate the practices of rough sleeping and inhabiting public space, with a focus on the modern city of Rome. By inhabiting public spaces, people who are homeless expose their private sphere to public view. Paradoxically, this public exposure of the private becomes a means of exclusion according to Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013).

Scholars acknowledge public space as constructed by the actions that people carry out in public (Lefebvre 1991; Tschumi 1996; Harvey 2012; Jon Goodbun et al. 2014). People who are homeless certainly contribute to the construction of public space (Petty 2016). However, as asserted by architectural scholar Gill Doron, certain practices “reveal how the public space is restricted to a very small spectrum of activities, and how many other activities are not permitted” (Doron 2000, p.254). These practices put into question what public these spaces are designed and designated for, questioning why only some activities are regarded as public and why some others take place only at night when spaces are temporary urban voids. Rough sleeping in Rome takes place mostly at night, exposing the city to its own fragilities and contradictions. Public space emerges as precarious. It is defined by social and cultural boundaries, within which urban practices alternate one with the other. These are irreconcilable poles within a parallax gap (Žižek 2009).

The theoretical scaffolding of the thesis is structured alongside two other transgressive case studies: Pussy Riot's occupation in Moscow and my interviews with parkour practitioners. These cases have been investigated in comparison with homelessness in order to highlight aspects concerning occupation of space as a performative action under precarious circumstances (precarity). The literary review is combined with auto-ethnographical studies I conducted with a community of rough sleepers, comprising 20-40 members who inhabit a portico area nearby St Peter's Square in Rome. I also ran focus groups, individual interviews and project presentations to people who either are involved in charitable bodies that deal with homelessness or are part of the general public,



such as passers-by in St Peter's Square. This study has revealed a series of aspects concerning the negotiation of public space and the role of agency and mediation.

This study has stimulated questions concerning the role design can play in discourses of social innovation and inclusion. The research conducted has also outlined difficulties concerning the range of data and the possible response to the many voices heard. How can design re-imagine the centre ground between alternative practices in space? By highlighting the centre as precarious, is it possible to find a way of re-thinking the centre?

On the basis of this study, the aim of the research has been to look at the state of the gap between these alternative poles, investigating and exploring the concept of precarity. This suggests the possibility of redefining concepts of mediation, social inclusion and architectural activism, articulated further through a series of speculative projects, concluding with the presentation of a “precarious” object I designed together with the community of rough sleepers in St Peter's Square and *COTRAD onlus* (a charitable body based in Rome).

# Declaration

"I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis; that the following thesis is entirely my own work; and that no part of this thesis has been submitted for another degree or qualification".

Signed



## *(h)Acknowledgements*

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# 1 Introduction

In this thesis I investigate the practices of rough sleeping and inhabiting public space by individuals who face homelessness, with a particular focus on the modern city of Rome. The focal point of this thesis is on whether and how architectural practice and theory can challenge and introduce nuance and concepts related to questions concerning the formation of inclusive public spaces. The research is conducted within the field of humanities and social science, particularly in the disciplines of architecture, design and architectural activism and deploys auto-ethnography and the production of socially provocative prototypes and cultural probes (specifically, I will deploy the portmanteau term “provotype”) as both research and learning tools.

The principal architectural interest of this doctoral dissertation is concerned with investigating the nature of the relationship among the contingency of individuals and diverse practices that take place in space. This involves neither an investigation of homelessness as possible alternative or disjunctive use of architectural space, nor is it solely on the construction of public space through an awareness of the other's presence, i.e. homeless individuals in space. Rather, this implies the investigation of the modalities through which architectural space is intended and constructed, attempting to propose new inclusive modalities for the construction of it. Hence, this thesis claims that public space does not nourish nor stimulates processes of familiarisation and social inclusion of the other. Conversely, within the remit of homelessness, public space is defined by social and cultural boundaries, within which urban practices alternate one with the other. It is the modality through which I decided to look at the distance between alternative poles that has determined the development of this thesis.

How can architectural practice and theory re-imagine the centre ground between alternative practices in space?

The exploration tools of this research have been centred on rough sleeping and inhabiting public space. However, the study of the themes inherent in the relationships among public space, inclusivity and homelessness has outlined difficulties concerning the range of data and the possible response to the many voices heard. Homelessness and public space represent complex topics that

depend on a variety of factors such as political, social, cultural and economic. These have been taken into account but constitute partial contributions. Rather, what has been regarded as of primary importance is the intertwining of the current body of literature around the topic of public space in questions of inclusivity and homelessness under the point of view of architectural studies.

The inhabitation of public space by individuals who face homelessness involves cities transnationally. A general overview of this phenomenon highlights how from the United States to Italy, passing through the United Kingdom and China, the political answer to the presence of rough sleepers on street consists in various hostile agencies. These include the application of fines, the confiscation of homeless people's belongings, the eviction from public space through the use of anti-homeless architecture, e.g. spikes. The modern city of Rome is no different. The use of anti-homeless architecture has been recently deployed in areas utilised by homeless individuals to sleep over night and to prevent the possibility of having a permanent use of these spaces. Recently a city councillor belonging to the Five Star Movement declared that the presence of individuals who are rough sleepers in an urban park nearby the Colosseum constitutes a form of urban decay<sup>1</sup> and argued that the presence of homeless individuals should be eradicated by stopping the provision of food by Caritas, one of the most important charitable bodies in Rome, to these subjects. More generally the presence of homeless people on street in Rome is tolerated since, as reported during an interview I had with Caritas, the situation of public spaces changes radically from day to night.

In fact, the situation underneath the portico area in St Peter's Square where I conducted the ethnographical studies shows how the routine of homeless individuals utilising this space depends on actions, defined in this thesis as survival tactics, consisting in the erasure of their traces and the faking of their presence under an apparent mundanity. The presence of people inhabiting the portico is revealed only at night, when the space of the portico is emptied of the presence of individuals other than rough sleepers. As briefly mentioned above, the practice of rough sleeping and inhabiting public space remains alternative to

1 Agenzia DIRE, "Roma, consigliere 5 Stelle alla Caritas: 'Stop pasti serali per clochard a Colle Oppio, è "pensione completa."'"

other daily practices of everyday life. In this respect, the issue at stake highlights contradictions between a definition of public space as a type of space open to social mix,<sup>2</sup> which is constructed through people's actions and through an aware of the other's presence,<sup>3</sup> and the conditions of use at stake in everyday life.



Illustration 1: The uses of St Peter's portico at day and night

Within the remit of architectural studies concerning questions of inclusivity and homelessness in public space, the vision of theoretical contributions on the subject can be summarised as a criticism aimed towards an idealised public space, which is celebratory of the presence of sociocultural differences in space. Architectural scholar Gil Doron, for instance, asserts that the practice of certain activities in public space, i.e. rough sleeping, puts into question which public these spaces are designed and designated for, questioning also why only some

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Programme on Human Settlements (UN-Habitat), "Charter of Public Space."

<sup>3</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* / Bernard Tschumi; White, "The Making, Shaking and Taking of Public Spaces"; Petty, "The London Spikes Controversy: Homelessness, Urban Securitisation and the Question of 'Hostile Architecture.'"

activities are regarded as public and why some others take place only at night or in remote areas, when spaces are temporary urban voids.<sup>4</sup> James Petty develops his argument, denouncing the use of spikes and anti-homeless architecture in relation to the construction of public space. He asserts that the presence of homeless people in public space at the same time gives meaning to public space and threatens it.<sup>5</sup> David Harvey claims a right to the city, a right to access of public space as a collective right expressed by a desire concerning the type of people city dwellers aim to be and nourished by the relationships that public space may stimulate.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, on the theme of homelessness and architectural design interventions in public space, the work of many architects and practitioners is concerned with the creation of tiny, pop-up shelters for homeless people.<sup>7</sup> Other experiments involved the possibility of opening tourists to experience rough sleeping on the street.<sup>8</sup> It becomes of primary importance to understand the limitations akin to both the critical accounts provided by the theoretical contributions and the architectural interventions realised on the subject of inclusion, public space and homelessness. In other words, what is pivotal is to understand and assess what type of social inclusion these accounts provide.

One of the central propositions of this research thesis is that both the existing body of literature on the subject of inclusivity and public space, and architectural interventions in support to homeless individuals, do not aim at manufacturing any process of inclusion. Rather, the danger is that in the attempt to provide social inclusion, these works may exacerbate social contrasts through the exclusion of other legitimate sociocultural actors, e.g. the question concerning the design of tiny shelters given for free to homeless people, among other criticisms, may raise the question concerning access to affordable housing by other people who, eventually, are workers but cannot afford to buy a house. In this sense, this research work agrees with the account provided by Jon Goodbun, Michael Klein

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4 Doron, M. Gil, “Transgressive Architecture – Testing the Boundaries of Inclusiveness.”

5 Petty, “The London Spikes Controversy: Homelessness, Urban Securitisation and the Question of ‘Hostile Architecture.’”

6 Harvey, *Rebel Cities : From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*.

7 Mairs, “James Furzer to Crowdfund Parasitic Sleeping Pods for London’s Homeless.”

8 “New Swedish Concept Hotel Offers Homeless Experience.”

and Andreas Rumfhuber and Jeremy Till on the subject of the production of scarcity, in that by unleashing scarcity one may produce scarcity elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

This analysis poses the focus on questions concerning the role of architects and researchers in discourses of social inclusion, which require further investigations and possibly a process of rethinking. The theme of homelessness is a transversal and inter-disciplinary topic in which, as outlined by the research question mentioned above, the exploration tools deployed are crucial. Three points are pivotal for the development of this research thesis: one to carry out an exhaustive analysis of the several social actors involved, i.e. individuals who are homeless, the general (housed) public, public institutions, activists, charitable bodies and volunteers, which seems unaddressed or absent in the current body of literature analysed, and which is aimed at highlighting the mechanisms through which social exclusion of homeless individuals is performed as much as of familiarisation with them. Two, to bring about a possible new reading and intending of public space, which is more inclusive of the modalities through which public space is constructed and experienced, and which allows for an analyses of the mechanisms of exclusion and familiarisation with homeless people. Three, the development of a design intervention aimed at proposing a new model of inclusivity in public space.

In light of the ethnographical studies (semi-structured and non-structured interviews, focus groups, project presentations, workshops) I carried out, it becomes clear that the range of sources analysed provides a partial, mono-perspective and often contradictory description of the issues concerning inclusivity, public space and homelessness. When encountering individuals who are homeless in St Peter's Square, their demands concerned the possibility of staying underneath the portico, refusing to use homeless shelters to sleep over night. However, most of them aim to find a job and, consequently the possibility of having a house. The encounters with people working for charitable bodies outlined their desire to house homeless people, whose presence on street is tolerated. Eventually, interviewees who were members of charitable bodies pointed out the necessity of opening unused buildings to house homeless people.

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9 Jon Goodbun et al., *The Design of Scarcity*.

At the same time, the research highlights how the provision of charitable services tends to diminish individuals who face homelessness' self-reliance and dignity, emphasising addiction and co-dependence. Additionally, the contribution from people who are not homeless highlighted another series of contradictory aspects. Passers-by who were interviewed in St Peter's Square claimed to accept homeless people's presence in the Square or in its proximity. However, there was also a manifested incapability of establishing emancipative forms of communications between those who are homeless and those who are not. The consolidated form of communication between these two sociocultural components were in the form of merciful donation of coins. Outside the context of St Peter's Square the perception of homeless people on street is different. Comments from interviewed citizens pointed in various degrees to indifference towards homeless people's presence or to a perception of the quality of public space as decadent due to their presence. The question concerning homeless individuals and access to public space also involves activism. The interview with a group of activists who led a protest in Nottingham in 2016 provides a telling example of the challenges in support of homeless people. It also poses stimulating questions on the role of activism and its adequacy.

Auto-ethnography proved to be an effective methodology to tackle and combine the variety of aspects that arose from the data collection. The operative, theoretical and research framework delineated by the research conducted outlines, from the point of view of an architect and researcher, the necessity of being in a modality of signification towards the data I was collecting, which involves the possibility of considering the whole array of contributions legitimate but partial views. According to Andrew Ballantyne, the picture depicted by everyday life in the realm of architecture should not be regarded as univocal. Rather this should be deemed as fluid and multi-perspective: "each description has its validity and its limits."<sup>10</sup>

The central proposition of this thesis therefore is to propose an interpretation of public space through the use of the metaphorical image of backdoors. I intend the term backdoor as the tool deployed in informatics to grant hidden access to a

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10 Ballantyne, "The Unit of Survival." See p. 43

system by users. To theorise public space as composed by backdoors implies two aspects: one, the presence of a threshold within which identities remain undefined. Two, these identities are revealed through the practice (passages through backdoors): this is a performative act depending on subjective interpretative processes, which are manifested due to the fact architectural space itself is a performative space. I contend that the issue with social inclusion/exclusion of homeless individuals in public space derives from the dovetailing between these two aspects. In fact, the second admits heterogeneity of use while the first implies the perception of a contingency of alterity in public space as chaotic.<sup>11</sup> This reasoning fits within the debate concerning private and public space in that these two aspects are descriptive of a type of space where individuals must behave so that they do not hurt the other. What takes place with certain practices, i.e. rough sleeping and inhabiting public space, highlights the duality of private/public in relation to tolerance/transgression<sup>12</sup> (we are tolerant up to a certain point/the practice either depends on survival tactics to grant its access in public; or it is forced to be practiced in remote and hidden areas; or when spaces are temporary urban voids) and consequently profanation<sup>13</sup> of space (the practice is banned from public view). My research appeals for a rethinking of the space in which practices (both individuals' and groups') appear, defined by Judith Butler as the space of appearance, a space-in-between people.<sup>14</sup> By rethinking this space as precarious rather than stable, this allows for a questioning of the relationship among the array of practices, adding nuance to the notion of public space as constructed by the actions and practices that take place in it.

The aim of this thesis is to analyse in greater depth the underpinnings beneath the mechanisms of exclusion in public space as much as the mechanisms of familiarisation with the unfamiliar other, by operating a critical and creative interpretation of the data collected. The question that emerged at the outset of this study concerns the possibility that architectural space, to be inclusive, is

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11 De Carolis, *Il paradosso antropologico : nicchie, micromondi e dissociazione psichica*.

12 Žižek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category"; Butler, "Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life? Adorno Prize Lecture."

13 Agamben, *Il Sacramento Del Linguaggio: Archeologia Del Giuramento (Homo Sacer II, 3)*.

14 Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street."



missing a component: a mediating element capable of making the diverse practices in space not just known but comprehended, by bringing to light their contribution to the construction of public space. This has stimulated questions concerning the role design can play in discourse of social inclusion of individuals who face homelessness, which informed the design of an object called *tait*. This is a socially provocative prototype, which was developed together with the community of rough sleepers who inhabit the portico area in St Peter's Square. The design of this object is also supported by the study of concepts such as precarity, performativity, scarcity, mediation, events and contributions from protest theory and hacker culture, which are revealed in the progress of this research work.

In order to support the meanings and the notions involved, I have chosen as supplementary research and explorative tools the inclusion of two "external" case studies: one, 2012 Pussy Riot's occupation in Moscow; two, an analysis of the practice of Parkour. These two case studies, although diverse by typology and location from both the topic of homelessness and the city of Rome, have been considered as metaphors useful to deepen the studies of mechanisms occurring in social exclusion of practices regarded as illicit and to highlight questions inherent in the relationship between institution (the range of controlling agencies) and urban practices, and self-emancipation/familiarisation with the other.

The contribution of this thesis is the revelation and description of the modalities through which public space is intended, experienced and constructed, unveiling the mechanisms that characterise social exclusion of people who are homeless and the mechanisms of familiarisation with them. The result of the analyses carried out in this research work culminates with the attempt to manufacture the construction of a more inclusive type of space by presenting a kinetic object. This is a piece of urban furniture, which incorporates recycled cardboard that could form both a city bench and temporary mattress. It is not intended only for the homeless person nor for the passer-by but for both. While constituting an aid for the first, preventing him/her from sleeping directly on the ground, it also serves public functions. Cardboard is symbolic of homelessness

and used for sleeping rough on the street. It has one main constraint: it is fragile and precarious, demanding people take care of it. Tait in this respect functions as a remainder: a sort of public ledger that reminds individuals of the traces of its use by previous users. It is also a shared and dynamic object, problematising the multifold way in which the portico area is used and shared. Finally, by using the object, each user (both homeless individuals and the general public) becomes part of mediation, while by respecting the fact the object is fragile, individuals allow for a remote other to enjoy and use the object in a future moment. In so doing, a form of mutual cooperation and dialogue is manufactured.

The overall aim of this research work is to highlight aspects that have not yet been researched, and to bring together controversial views and critical discussions about potential future directions in questions concerning socially inclusive public spaces and homelessness. It appears of primary importance to suggest new modalities to investigate public space in relation to social inclusion. In order to allow for meaningful and emancipative interactions in public space, it is essential to identify the array of practices and social actors that take place in space, study their nature and underpinnings, determine potential opportunities and then design tools to support them. These findings would contribute to our basic understanding of public space in questions of inclusivity. Additionally, these propose new directions for design, for architectural practice and for further researches.

### **1.1.1 Thesis Development**

In the next chapter the methodology deployed in the empirical research and the research methods used are described in detail. These consist of a combination of auto-ethnographical methodologies and the production of socially provocative prototypes and cultural probes. The description of auto-ethnography will comprise aspects related to the motivations that have led me to include the theme of homelessness in this research work. Additionally, other contributions will include studies on the notion of precarity and mediation.

In Chapter 3 a literary review is conducted on the basic concepts that are the core of this thesis. These comprise issues related to public space in questions concerning inclusivity, space as interior, as an exterior-room, space of appearance and the presence of sociocultural domains in space. These concepts are fundamental in order to form an understanding of the argument concerning inclusive public space and people who are homeless. Chapter 4 will provide a description of the relationship between public space and homeless. This will be mainly based on the ethnographical research I conducted but it will also include contributions from the literary review of architectural interventions to support homeless people.

In Chapter 5 the arguments developed in Chapter 3 and 4 are combined and critically reviewed. Additionally, these are further supported by accounts on marginality in space and hybrid spaces from scholars in sociology. The aim of this chapter is to propose a notion of public space as composed by backdoor, highlighting the mechanisms that occur in social exclusion as much as inclusion of homeless people in space. These two aspects are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6 and 7.

Chapter 6 discusses aspects related to visibility, exclusion and survival tactics in space. By analysing Pussy Riot's occupation of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, the chapter will investigate issues related to profanation, antagonism and serious parody. Consequently, these are compared with homeless people's exclusion. The chapter's overall aim is to highlight the importance of critically and creatively reviewing the survival tactics deployed by homeless individuals in public space as having the potential of provoking social inclusion. Chapter 7 will discuss notions of legitimacy, illegitimacy and familiarisation of the practice of rough sleeping in public space by analysing the practice of parkour. The chapter will empirically rework the concept of familiarisation through the notion of event as an encounter with the unfamiliar other.

Chapter 8 will present the intervention realised into space. The chapter's aim is to provide a detailed description of it, providing also insights concerning the

way this material intervention has contributed to inform the theory at the core of this research work. The concluding chapter 9 represents the conclusion of this thesis. It will bring together all the arguments, highlighting the importance of each one and its contribution to the understanding of questions of inclusivity, public space and homelessness.



## **2 Methodological approaches to homelessness and public space**

One of the questions that emerged from the previous chapter concerned the necessity of defining modalities and explorational tools to investigate the issues at stake in questions of inclusivity, public space and homelessness. The contradictory aspects highlighted and the specificity of the themes of this thesis suggested the adoption of auto-ethnographical and ethnographical methodologies. These are supported by the production of socially provocative prototypes as a means to pursue an architectural activist practice. Hence, the aim of this chapter is to delineate the basic questions and motivations based on the researcher's personal experiences that have determined the trajectories for the development of both the designed object and the arguments and topics that are discussed in this thesis. Thus, the discussion in this chapter will privilege the description of auto-ethnographical tools in combination with aspects related to architectural activism. The component of ethnographical methodologies deployed will be presented in the fourth chapter and critically reviewed in Chapter 5. Moreover, in the thesis' progression I will adopt conceptual project works, i.e. production of conceptual images, architectural competition entries, aimed at exploring some of the complexities and concepts at the core of this thesis.

The trajectories of this research have been influenced by the personal experiences of the researcher. This particular aspect should be framed within the description of the activist architect as presented in the book *Radical Cities: Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture* by James McGuirk. The journalist asserts that the aim of an architectural activist is to provoke momentum. To achieve this momentum, the practice involves action,<sup>15</sup> which can be distilled into three main aspects: first, a direct engagement with a client who does not expect your help anyway. Second, action implies effect and not aesthetic. Third, action in the form of establishing active forms of dialogue among the involved stakeholders. These aspects imply the adoption of unpredictable solutions. The

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15 McGuirk, *Radical Cities : Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture*. In fact, the main difference between traditional architectural practices and activist architecture is the propensity to act rather than waiting for your clients to come. This is described by McGuirk with the example of the architect waiting for a call from his clients in the movie *The Fountainhead* (p. 28). However, it should be outlined that this difference entails mainly an interest of the activist architect to social issues, such as the one involving people who face homelessness.

activist architect does not work according to a precise methodology or by following a precise style. As McGuirk writes:

*I prefer to think of them as [...] idealist pragmatist. It means that, where necessary, methods must adapt themselves to the prevailing conditions, that flexibility and lateral thinking are prerequisites, that there is no orthodox answer.*<sup>16</sup>

Auto-ethnographical methodologies and in particular self-reflexivity seemed to be appropriate to question some of the sociocultural aspects at the core of this research. They provide space for a reconsideration of how a researcher thinks, carries out his/her research and establishes relationships with both the research subject and the involved actors.<sup>17</sup> Interdisciplinary researchers Ellis, Adams and Bochner from the University of South Florida define auto-ethnography as a methodology that “seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).”<sup>18</sup> According to these scholars auto-ethnographical methodologies are a combination of autobiographical insights, personal reflections and interpretations. Additionally, these can also include ethnographical tools such as interviews to people regarded as either outsider or insider to the subject of investigation.<sup>19</sup> The aim of auto-ethnography is to constitute a narrative where and when the inclusion in research of personal insights is unattainable. The use of personal experiences is aimed at examining and offering a critical stance on cultural experiences, inviting the researcher to reflect upon the nuances of that experience.<sup>20</sup>

In terms of personal experiences, this research contemplates concepts of performativity, intending this as a claim to existence,<sup>21</sup> and notions of the event as

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16 Ibid. p. 32.

17 Jones, Adams, and Ellis, *Handbook of Autoethnography*.

18 Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, *Autoethnography: An Overview. Qualitative Social Research*, 12 (1).

19 Jones, Adams and Ellis define insiders as cultural members while outsiders are defined cultural strangers. However, during the research this distinction was often difficult to acknowledge in the interviewees. The sense is that perhaps the distinction between cultural strangers and cultural members within the remit of homelessness is more due to the context within which the interviews were carried out.

20 Jones, Adams, and Ellis, *Handbook of Autoethnography*.

21 Butler, “Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life? Adorno Prize Lecture.”



an encounter with an unknown other.<sup>22</sup> The research seeks to understand and recognise the potentialities related to the encounter with individuals who face homelessness. Analysis of the notion of event in combination with personal experiences constitutes a fundamental part in the development of this thesis. Moreover, in order to explore further the nuances related to the encounter with the unfamiliar other, i.e. homeless individuals, the investigation was concerned with the possibility of including two aspects: first, the notion of precarity related to the idea of event as an accident.<sup>23</sup> This aspect has been experienced through a collaboration with the Roman architecture collective Stalker/Osservatorio Nomade. Second, to re-evaluate the personal approach both as an architect and as a researcher to individuals who are homeless. Initially, this will be described as a process of creative interpretation of the account provided by Italian scholar Davide Susanetti, concerning the interrogation of spectres in ancient Greek culture.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the discussion will embrace the description of a designed object. This is a socially provocative prototype, which has to be intended as a supportive investigational tool.

### 2.1.1 Encountering Homelessness in (Public) Space

It was 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2014. I was back in Rome to spend the Christmas holidays with my family and friends. On that night, I decided to make a visit to the Christmas tree and the Nativity in St Peter's Square. This is customary for Roman citizens and in fact, although it was really cold, the square was well attended. The group of people around the centre of the Square were busy taking self shots attempting to centre themselves, the tree, the Nativity and some portion of St Peter's Basilica's facade. On the way back to the car, I noticed a group of people rough sleeping underneath one of the portico area located next to Bernini's colonnade. Just one minute before I was somehow acting as being part of that Square together with a multitude of strangers and one minute after I was caught by a sense of loneliness. I had the sense of being the only individual who apparently was caring about the presence of homeless people sleeping rough next to St Peter's Square during Christmas time.

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22 Dastur, "Phenomenology of the Event: Waiting and Surprise."

23 Virilio, *City of Panic* / Paul Virilio ; Translated by Julie Rose.

24 Susanetti, *Atene post-occidentale : spettri antichi per la democrazia contemporanea*.



Illustration 2: People rough sleeping under one of St Peter's Square Portico

However, in the process of writing up this doctoral thesis I must acknowledge to myself that the interest in homelessness was not with surprise. I must assume some form of event was already at work at that time. Often, researchers who are adept at deploying auto-ethnographical methodologies speak of epiphanies, moments that have had a significant impact on a person's life.<sup>25</sup> That night was one of these. Since that moment, I decided both as an architect and a researcher involved in doctoral studies that homelessness should have been included in the thesis. I was perhaps witnessing a moment where the development of my doctoral work was heading to a blind alley. Perhaps, I was simply looking for a subject to focus my studies more specifically. Most certainly, I was interested in homelessness because I was spending part of my life helping people who face this life condition in Edinburgh as a volunteer for a charitable project. In February 2013 I began serving at *The Homeless Project*. This is a

<sup>25</sup> Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, *Autoethnography: An Overview. Qualitative Social Research*, 12 (1).

charitable service run by the Sisters of Mercy at St Catharine's Convent, a space located not far from the Edinburgh College of Art Main Building on Lauriston Place. With the help of volunteers, most of them students at Edinburgh, the sisters provide meals and clothes to people who are homeless in the city. The service is run twice a day, breakfast at 9:00 am and dinner at 6:00 pm. However, the service is also attended by people who are facing socio-economic difficulties but who are not homeless.

At the beginning of my service in 2013 I felt the experience of helping homeless people was somehow a personal duty. As a matter of fact, I continuously said to myself that the reason why I was there helping was because individuals who face homelessness need someone to take care of them. They need help and to some extent, perhaps, they also deserve it. This thought helped me feel a better person. However, I was regarding the service as something already given. I was simply serving food to individuals who cannot afford to provide it by themselves. By doing so, it is possible to say that I was foreclosing myself to any deeper and more authentic experience of the other.

On a Sunday in November 2014 I attended *The Homelessness Sunday*, a service run by the Sisters of Mercy once a year where the names of homeless people who have passed away are remembered and candles are lit. During the service there were a group of homeless people attending. One of the congregation, she herself homeless, as a name was announced began shouting and crying as she walked through the chapel towards the altar to say a few words in memory. I never knew of her relationship to this person. However, that circumstance had an impact on me. As French philosopher Françoise Dastur writes, it was a conversion, an event that revisited the idea I had of volunteering in the charitable project as much as of the people attending the service.<sup>26</sup>

Dastur explains that conversion is a type of event that “takes possession of us in an unforeseen manner, without warning, and which brings us towards an unanticipated future.”<sup>27</sup> Italian philosopher Davide Tarizzo in the preface of the Italian edition of Gilles Deleuze’s *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* comments on

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<sup>26</sup> Dastur, “Phenomenology of the Event: Waiting and Surprise.”

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. P. 182

Deleuze's notion of event, writing that "an event is a ladder (in tights) of the World. [It] is something completely unpredictable and totally accidental that ladders every wire and every pattern of necessity that ties up a World, a Universe, a *Kosmos*."<sup>28</sup> Tarizzo refers to the *Kosmos*, intending this as itself a system, i.e. an individual. These systems, as Tarizzo contends, are ruled by "a set of rules or regularities that bind and uniform [them]."<sup>29</sup> Gilles Deleuze explains that "events are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes."<sup>30</sup> This screen is described as "a formless elastic membrane, an electromagnetic field, or the receptacle of the *Timaeus*."<sup>31</sup> The screen functions as a membrane which filters the *Many*, making it becomes *One*. Hence, the event for Deleuze is both "a man has been run over. [And] the Great pyramid is an event."<sup>32</sup>

Scholar in philosophy Brent Adkins suggests that the event for Deleuze is differential and ubiquitous.<sup>33</sup> Events have no spatio-temporal location but they are ongoing processes. Adkins writes that "[a]ny and every change in intensity is something new, a point at which difference is produced. Furthermore, every difference is connected to every other difference as a differential structure."<sup>34</sup> Professor of philosophy James Williams adds that "all events communicate in one Event where communication is not in terms of set meanings but in terms of processes."<sup>35</sup> However, there is no one univocal Event for Deleuze; rather events (multiplicity) communicate with one another in an ever-changing series. Williams contends that the process inherent in Deleuze's notion of event has been influenced by a concept elaborated by the philosopher Spinoza. In particular, the process implies a reworking of each series of events so that they "express the cause in the effect."<sup>36</sup> In this respect, Dastur asserts that for a conversion to

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28 Deleuze and Tarizzo, *La Piegia: Leibniz E Il Baroccop*. 14

29 Ibid. p.15

30 Deleuze, *The Fold : Leibniz and the Baroque* / Gilles Deleuze ; Foreword and Translation by Tom Conley. p. 86

31 Ibid. p. 86

32 Deleuze, *The Fold : Leibniz and the Baroque* / Gilles Deleuze ; Foreword and Translation by Tom Conley. p. 86

33 Adkins, "Deleuze and Badiou on the Nature of Events."

34 Ibid. p. 514

35 Williams, "If Not Here, Then Where? On the Location and Individuation of Events in Badiou and Deleuze." p. 98

36 Ibid. p. 98

happen, a subject must be in the right disposition, which implies being in a modality of *signification* rather than of *something already given*.<sup>37</sup>

In this respect, it is plausible to affirm that the event/epiphany I experienced during *The Homelessness Sunday* has determined the future steps of this research. In other words, once faced with the presence of people rough sleeping under the portico area in St Peter's Square, the series of events, which included my experience as a volunteer for a charitable project with homeless people but also the fact I was carrying out research and studies on protest, activism and alternative practices in architectural space, determined an interest in this theme. However, while the description of the event/epiphany gives an account of the trajectories that this research has undertaken since December 2014, it also prompted me to reason about the difference between being in a modality of signification and of something already given. The importance of understanding this aspect is a crucial aspect of this research. In architectural terms it implies the fact that the way through which people may relate with an unfamiliar other, i.e. homeless individuals on street, becomes material in the form of qualitative data. These data can be then translated into architectural design and determine the possibility of favouring encounters among diverse sociocultural subjects in architectural space.

What I was observing that night in St Peter's Square was precisely the difference between perceiving the presence of homeless people rough sleeping next to St Peter's Square and Basilica as something already given, somehow expected, and as something that may have had some more significance. My first reaction was indignation, which I expressed in a Twitter post addressed to Pope Francis.

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37 Dastur, "Phenomenology of the Event: Waiting and Surprise."



**Fabrizio Gesuelli** @FabGes... 21/12/14  
@Pontifex\_it perché loro al freddo e tu  
e noi al caldo?



Illustration 3: Tweet sent to Pope Francis "Why are they rough sleeping while we are staying warm?"

The seeming indifference I noticed reminded me of a book I had read a few months before: *The City and the City* by novelist China Miéville. As it happens in the two fictional cities of Beszel and Ul Quoma, which occupy the same geographical space, in this case too the citizens have learnt to “unsee” the unfamiliar other. The book in fact tells the story of two cities that overlap, crosshatch and mingle with one another with the citizens belonging to one side that have learnt to “unsee” the citizens belonging to the other side. Two people can walk down side by side, one from Beszel and the other from Ul Quoma, ignoring one another and each seeing a completely different set of passers-by, customs, and environments. The two cities and the respective citizens are completely invisible to each other.<sup>38</sup> In some way, that night I felt like a block was removed and now I could see these individuals who were inhabiting space.

<sup>38</sup> Walsh, “The City and the City.”

Therefore, as an architect I felt I had to do something. However, at the beginning I was not concerned with questions of inclusivity in public space. Rather, I wanted to try solving the problem with people sleeping rough. And yet, what was the cause of my indignation? Was it passers-by' indifference that made me feel disdainful? Or was it the presence of individuals who are homeless in public space and perhaps need help? Philosopher Slavoj Žižek asserts that these two questions are like the two faces of a same coin: an existence without appearance (indifference towards the homeless person) and representation without existence (the homeless person is lacking something).<sup>39</sup> They are related to how desire and fantasy are expressed in everyday life.

Within this philosophical account, everyday life cannot really be formalised by a subject. Per se, it does not have formal qualities.<sup>40</sup> Rather it may be perceived as chaotic.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, people tend to form closed groups, laying in the paradoxical condition of being, on one side, open to exploring as many differing mundane social conditions. On the other side, people are also prone to creating closed niches, separating what is regarded as familiar from a denied and generalised unfamiliar outside.<sup>42</sup> Žižek writes that "the object [i.e. everyday life, including the possible encounter with homeless people] assumes clear and distinctive features only if we look at it 'at an angle', i.e. with an 'interested' view, supported, permeated, and 'distorted' by desire."<sup>43</sup> The presence of individuals who are homeless and sleep rough nearby St Peter's Square acquired signification only when I projected my desires onto them, i.e. the necessity of providing a shelter or to make other people aware of their presence. However, that was not perhaps what these individuals were effectively lacking or demanding. Rather this was what I perceived they would have needed. The issue at stake is not concerned with acknowledging the presence of people who are rough sleepers; rather it involves the perception of them.

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39 Žižek and Schelling, *The Abyss of Freedom / Slavoj Žižek. Ages of the World / F.W.J. von Schelling*.

40 Ibid.

41 De Carolis, *Il paradosso antropologico : nicchie, micromondi e dissociazione psichica*.

42 Žižek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category"; De Carolis, *Il paradosso antropologico : nicchie, micromondi e dissociazione psichica*. In particular De Carolis defines this aspect as an anthropological paradox, which determines the adoption of dissociative practices.

43 Žižek, "Looking Awry an Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture." p. 14.

By rethinking my experience with homeless people before *The Homelessness Sunday*, I already mentioned the fact that I was foreclosing myself to having a deeper experience of the people attending the service. In other words, I intended them as people who needed help, justifying this as a mere sociocultural difference: the individuals who I was helping had simply decided to have that life and I was not entitled to judge this but only to offer my help. However, by doing so I was, perhaps unwittingly, depriving homeless individuals of any agency and a sense of self.<sup>44</sup>

By self-reflecting on what happened during *The Homelessness Sunday*, this made reason upon those basic things that also define my everyday life: feelings such as love or friendship; the image of a homeless woman, crying and shouting inside the chapel at the Sisters of Mercy's convent made me reflect that these individuals have, at least something, i.e. friendship, a sense of sharing their existence with other people. And perhaps, in so doing they may be also sharing shelters or food or other basic commodities. That crying woman made me think about the significance of experiencing a life within precarity and of sharing precarity with other individuals who have found themselves in a similar situation.

### **2.1.2 Experiencing precarity in space**

I had already encountered the aspect related to precarity in my research. In May 2014 I developed an image for an ideas competition. The image was even awarded the Editor's Choice Award. The competition brief demanded that participants reason about "lying doors": what would have happened if doors started lying to users? My entry reasoned about architect and theorist Paul Virilio's definition of an accident<sup>45</sup> and linked this with notions of performativity.

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44 Parsell, "'Homeless Is What I Am, Not Who I Am': Insights from an Inner-City Brisbane Study."

45 Precisely, Virilio's definition of "event-accident" is: "whether you like it or not, to create an event now means to provoke an accident. [...] An accident is in fact an assault on the property of substance, an unveiling of its nakedness, of the poverty of whatever, whoever is confronted by what happens unexpectedly – to people as much as to their creations". See *Virilio, City of Panic / Paul Virilio ; Translated by Julie Rose pp. 28-32.*





Illustration 4: "To Make an Event is To Create an Accident"

While doors admit a linear path, they promise users that they will open to a room, my entry envisioned the condition when this linearity is broken and dislocated, in other words, made uncertain. The entry portrayed the intersections of doors' paths while showing possible unexpected encounters between subjects. The core idea was to show how the common exposition to precarity may lead to the definition of forms of relation and reciprocal collaboration between the subjects involved. This idea echoes philosopher Judith Butler's account of precarity. As she writes: "[o]ur shared exposure to precarity is but one ground of

our potential equality and our reciprocal obligations to produce together conditions of liveable life.”<sup>46</sup>

Everyday reality offers continuously examples of how under precarious circumstances people are more willing to familiarise with the unfamiliar other. Such examples span from strangers talking to each other when for instance a flight is delayed to more complex situations as happened during the Paris attacks in 2015. It should not be surprising if in that circumstance, many Parisians started tweeting #Portouverte (literally doors opened), offering to host and help strangers that were on street. The same attitude then was manifested in the terrorist attack in Manchester last May. In the development of this research I could experience the aspect of finding myself in a precarious situation in form of an architectural exploration. It took place during an explorational walk with the Roman architecture collective Stalker/Osservatorio Nomade.



Illustration 5: Some of the tweets after Paris attack in November 2015

46 Butler, “Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life? Adorno Prize Lecture.” p. 18

Stalker have been one of the initial architectural groups who questioned the concept of otherness in architecture, addressing it as both being/becoming the other and dealing with the other. Since 1995 when they started the project called *Territori Attuali* (Actual Territories), Stalker/Osservatorio Nomade has developed a research project based on walking as both cognitive (aesthetic) practice and exploratory way of understanding alterity. In Stalker's Manifesto it is written that walking is the modality "to be in those spaces with no mediation."<sup>47</sup> Walking is a modality of producing space.<sup>48</sup> However, Stalker's Manifesto suggests the possibility of walking with no mediation. In other words, this involves the production of space within precarious circumstances.

Hence, I took part in the project *Stalker walk Stalker*. In particular one of the walks I attended was the reiteration of *Stalker Rundown: homage to Robert Smithson*. The walk, which was firstly carried out in 1996, aimed to reach Cava di Selci, an abandoned cave in Rome, seeking the artwork *Asphalt Rundown* created by artist Robert Smithson in 1965.<sup>49</sup> The group of people comprised 20 to 30 members. Most of them were strangers. We departed from Laurentina subway station, located on the South side of Rome, and proceeded East. However, we did not have any precise path to follow. We walked through more urbanised areas such as a neighbourhood named Laurentino 38 to enter into rural areas. Here, the walk we undertook became open to uncertainty concerning the path, the typology of ground, the presence of barriers and jurisdictions signalling private properties and the absence of road signals. The only paradigm while walking into these rural areas was the fact that precarity was somehow universal. As a group we were experiencing that aspect of ephemeral, described by Italian

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47 Translated from Stalker's Manifesto: "Stalker attraversa a piedi i Territori Attuali, è questo il modo individuato per essere in quegli spazi senza mediazioni, per partecipare delle loro dinamiche." Available at <http://www.osservatorionomade.net/tarkowsky/manifesto/manifest.html>

48 Careri, *Walkscapes : Camminare Come Pratica Estetica* / Francesco Careri ; Prefazione Di Gilles A. Tiberghien.

49 Robert Smithson was an American artist interested in land art and temporality. Smithson's practice invites to reflect upon the effect of human activities on landscape and environment. *Asphalt Rundown* was created by the artist in 1969 and involved casting asphalt on one of the crest of Cava de Selci.

scholar Davide Susanetti as “dependency on the day”<sup>50</sup>: the constant exposition of human life to precarity.



Illustration 6: Entering into more rural areas. On the background Laurentino 38

Precarity became the shared ground and allowed us to deploy forms of mutual collaboration. Hence, when we had to cross small rivers, we used tree trunks, helping and preventing each other from slipping. When there were barriers to private properties, we cut the fences to gain access into them, to find ourself walking into desolate and abandoned fields. There was not a precise path to follow. The walk involved adaptation over the diverse range of conditions faced by the group of participants. We were a group of strangers who were becoming familiar to each other by exploring and adapting ourselves to

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<sup>50</sup> Susanetti, *Atene post-occidentale : spettri antichi per la democrazia contemporanea*. The translation from the Italian version is “dipendenza dal giorno”(p. 104). Ephemeral according to the scholar is not so much a matter of duration of time, but rather the fact that the future is uncertain that makes every day ephemeral, implying the constant exposition of human life to precarity.



precarious conditions. This however implied the necessity of helping each other mutually in order to overcome the various obstacles encountered during the walk.



Illustration 7: People helping each other while crossing a river

What I experienced with Stalker brought me to reason about a particular aspect. Philosophers Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou define it as *responsibilisation* towards the other: disposition to an unknown other where the I

is social and connected with the we.<sup>51</sup> This was the aspect that determined the possibility of me helping other people during the walk. It did not only entail an acknowledgement of precarity as a shared condition among the participants. Rather, I was acknowledging the fact that not all the participants were ready to face precarity, that not all of them were somehow able or trained to undertake the walk safely and equally. To acknowledge this signified opening myself towards the other as much as the other to publicly show his/her own limitations. In this respect, it is possible to understand why Butler and Athanasiou contend that disposition is what makes precarity and performativity emerge together in the form of a dispossession.<sup>52</sup>

I presume that the woman who was crying and shouting during *The Homelessness Sunday* was doing so because she experienced and shared a similar condition of precarity with her friends and in light of this memory she was suffering. Did this type of bond determine the possibility of experiencing a liveable life, despite the life circumstances that had led that woman to live on the street?<sup>53</sup>

### 2.1.3 Revisiting the approach to homelessness in public space

When approaching individuals who are homeless these reasonings and feelings acquire even more values, because they imply ethical considerations. By encountering homeless individuals I have found myself in the position of not having a clear idea of what I may have offered as an architect and researcher. Certainly, the homeless individuals I met regarded their life condition as undesirable.<sup>54</sup> However, beyond this aspect I had the impression that every solution I could possibly propose to them to tackle the condition of being homeless and rough sleep in public space would have been accepted. However, during one of the encounters I realised that the most challenging aspect as a researcher, who was trying to understand how to affect a condition I judged with

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51 Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*.

52 Ibid.

53 Butler, "Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life? Adorno Prize Lecture."

54 Parsell, "'Homeless Is What I Am, Not Who I Am': Insights from an Inner-City Brisbane Study."

indignation, concerned the difficulty of empathising with individuals who face homelessness. This happened when encountering Dario, one of the occupants of the portico area in St Peter's Square. In that occasion he said to me that the most important aspect was that I kept going there with them and, because of this, I should not feel ashamed.

What Dario was demanding of me involved a request for dignity and an acknowledgement of his life as a person. Since that moment I struggled with understanding the circumstances that could lead someone to find him/herself homeless and inhabit public space. Judith Butler contends that this reasoning questions whether a life may be regarded as liveable. According to the American philosopher, it invites us to reflect upon what differentiation of values implies: it is not possible to determine the value of an individual's life without determining the structure that gives value to that life and establishes differences among lives.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, a possible way to measure the quality of the life an individual experiences should entail all the social interactions that may support that person's life.<sup>56</sup> Judith Butler seems to advocate a type of value that is not determined by simply economic wealth, which is surely part of what can be regarded as a good life. However, she asserts that the value of a life should be measured according to the social ecology around an individual's life. Living a liveable life concerns questions about whether the social ecology around each person determines forms of support for that life that may prevent him/her from disappearing.<sup>57</sup>

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55 Butler, "Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life? Adorno Prize Lecture".

56 This aspect can also be intended as having a horizon. Scholar Monica Seger comments on Daniele Ciprì and Franco Maresco's film *A Memoria*, where the two directors depict the life of people that without horizon no longer seek to understand but only obey to basic needs: "to have a horizon means to have a broad frame of reference for interpreting the world, to be able to act with foresight and an understanding of long-term consequences. This means that a person in full possession of a horizon acts with awareness of the future." See Seger, "Unattainable Horizons: On History, Man and Land in the Films of Ciprì and Maresco."

57 Butler, "Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life? Adorno Prize Lecture." Disappearing in this sense should be intended as the possibility of ending up facing homelessness. I have often questioned myself about the possibility I could find myself homeless. In this respect, I strongly believe that whether I would find myself in economical difficulties, I could count on the presence of friends and family members who would be there to help. This marks an important difference. However in the development of this research I acknowledged this question could be misleading and perhaps without a precise answer.

Conversely, Dario was inviting me to reflect upon his precarity and to acknowledge his request to overcome it. According to Butler, “performativity does take place when the uncounted prove to be reflexive and start to count themselves, not only enumerating who they are, but ‘appearing’ in some way, exercising in that way a “right” (extralegal, to be sure) to existence.”<sup>58</sup> The issue at stake was not that Dario did not feel himself recognised within the group of other people who are homeless in St Peter's Square. Rather, Dario was claiming his right to existence and asking me, an architect, researcher and housed individual, to acknowledge it.

It was this last account that invited me to reconsider my approach to homeless individuals. At the beginning I was concerned with understanding what I could produce to end the condition of facing homelessness by these people. My initial thought was to design small shelters, which could be possibly applied to street advertising boards. Despite the fact similar proposals have already been developed by other designers,<sup>59</sup> this type of solution could fail to take into account three main aspects. First, the possibility that the community of homeless individuals in St Peter's Square wanted to stay underneath the portico. Therefore, the possibility of having tiny shelters could disregard the role played by the fact these people inhabit that space as a group. Second, individuals who are homeless may wish to be housed. However, the meaning of house for these individuals may be the one of a physical house, i.e. a flat in a residential building rather than a pop-up shelter.<sup>60</sup> Third, an aspect that came out during the interviews held with people who are not homeless. My informants have often questioned me about the importance I was giving to homeless people. They asked me a legitimate question, which resonated with my personal experience of being the son of a single mother who has always worked but who could never

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58 Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, p. 101

59 In 2014, the Slovakian architectural firm designdevelop attempted to convert billboards into houses for homeless people. The houses should have been costless and self-paid by the income deriving from publicity on their advertisement space. However, the project titled *Project Gregory*, remained unrealised. See Katie Richards, “A Design Firm In Slovakia Is Turning Billboards Into Mini Houses.”

60 Parsell, “Home Is Where the House Is: The Meaning of Home for People Sleeping Rough.” The research carried out by sociologist Parsell highlights how the meaning of home for people who are rough sleepers is the one of a house. This aspect was also highlighted by some of the occupants of the portico in St Peter's Square during the encounters. See Chapter 4.



afford to buy a house: why would a homeless person deserve more attention than people who work but cannot afford to buy a house and are forced to live at their parent's house or to rent a flat?

Effectively, it is possible to assume that Dario, when performing that demand, was showing he possessed a sense of self and agency,<sup>61</sup> aspects that, conversely, I was somehow neglecting. To take Justin McGuirk's account on architectural activism back, the unorthodox solution invoked by the journalist involved the adoption of a possible methodological approach through which I could look at the issue with homelessness. This was envisioned while reading the book *Atene Post Occidentale* (literally Post-Western Athens) by Italian scholar in Greek mythology Davide Susanetti. Empirically, it involved a process of creative interpretation of his account of one of the topics described in his book: the interrogation of spectres in ancient Greek mythology.<sup>62</sup>

The interrogation of the dead is described as a ritual, which is deployed by people who are seeking answers. It involves the use of blood as the vehicle through which the dead can speak and open to truth. However, Susanetti also argues that blood is an extraneous element to the spectre. It constitutes the subjectivity of the person who is interrogating it, which, by running through the spectre, could lead to a mystified truth. Effectively, in metaphorical terms the aspect of blood can be seen as a warning identified with the danger of sympathising with the homeless person. This, as described above, could have led me to insist on the necessity of housing homeless people. Moreover, Susanetti is also concerned with the possibility of considering spectres as simply the other. This entails a relationship with individuals who are homeless that is reduced to a sociocultural difference. Hence, the Italian scholar suggests the possibility of an inversion of the gaze: "spectres are the only true plane of reality while events are just the shadows of a metaphorical theatre."<sup>63</sup> What was the inversion of the gaze that Susanetti is referring to? At first, my knowledge and experience led me to link this inversion with the one championed by Žižek with the example of the

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61 Parsell, "'Homeless Is What I Am, Not Who I Am': Insights from an Inner-City Brisbane Study."

62 Susanetti, *Atene post-occidentale : spettri antichi per la democrazia contemporanea*.

63 Ibid. pp. 24-26

movie *Woman in the Window* by Fritz Lang.<sup>64</sup> Žižek uses this film to examine the relationship between dreams and reality, proposing an inversion of the gaze and asserting that the true reality is actually what takes place in one's individual dream world. He points out that what happens in an individual's dream world is actually repressed in everyday life. However, this approach could underlie the possibility of fictionalising the question of inclusive public space and homelessness. Again, this could have implied the desire to house individuals who are homeless.

In the progression of this thesis I will show the danger inherent in this approach, discussing how the modalities with which other social actors, i.e. activists, architects, passers-by, charitable bodies, have approached homelessness trigger a *master/slave dialectic*. Conversely, I argue that people who are homeless are neither the master nor the slave. Rather, they move between these two poles.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the approach I decided to follow has attempted to accompany, nurture and stimulate this last aspect. The inversion of the gaze suggested by Susanetti has been regarded with the possibility of acknowledging the condition of being homeless not as something negative, a condition that necessitated being treated and cured.<sup>66</sup> Rather, it was regarded as a condition to be listened to and observed, by promoting this process through the direct engagement of the several subjects involved, e.g. in St Peter's Square portico this implied both homeless individuals and passers-by.

#### 2.1.4 The use of socially provocative prototypes

To achieve this inversion of the gaze required to be supported by the adoption of a designed object. This resulted in the development of a kinetic piece of urban

64 Žižek, "Looking Awry an Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture." pp. 17-20

65 See Chapter 5. In particular, this account is derived by the studies I carried out on the notion of parasite and mediation as accounted by philosopher Michel Serres. Social theorist and Michel Serres' commentator Stephen Crocker suggests that: "the master-slave dialectic describes how a subject becomes an object, or vice versa. The parasite, however, is in the place of neither the subject nor the object. It is a device, an operator, by means of which one is able to turn into the other. It has a relation to the relation between subjects and objects." See Crocker, "Noises and Exceptions: Pure Mediality in Serres and Agamben." p. 11.

66 This aspect recalls the description of traditional architectural practices, the architect as a surgeon or a doctor. See McGuirk, *Radical Cities : Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture.*; Till, *Architecture Depends / Jeremy Till*.

furniture, which can form both city bench and temporary mattress. It is called  $\lambda\text{It}$ <sup>67</sup> (read  $\lambda\text{It}$ , pr. Tight) and made out of recycled cardboard. The name of the object is indeed the acronym for *the average is ten*. Ten centimetres is the thickness of each cardboard panel, which constitutes the object and thus the distance between a body laying down on  $\lambda\text{It}$  and the ground. The object reflects and invites us to reflect upon the three aspects related to action and architectural activism outlined in the introduction of this chapter.



Illustration 8:  $\lambda\text{It}$ , the first prototype realised

The first aspect was concerned with helping a client who does not expect your help anyway. Justin McGuirk adds that this is due to the fact the client is generally the urban poor.<sup>68</sup> The most direct form of help that the object attempts

<sup>67</sup> The name comes from the expression sleep tight! Furthermore, it should be noted that the greek letter  $\lambda$  (lambda) present in the name is the measurement unit used to indicate the thermal insulation capacity of materials. In this respect, one of the aims of the object is to make people who are rough sleepers feel more comfortable when sleeping.

<sup>68</sup> McGuirk, *Radical Cities : Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture*. The

to manufacture concerns sleeping rough. Tait's aim is to prevent people who are homeless from sleeping on the ground. During the on-field observations I could appreciate how some of the individuals who are rough sleepers utilise small mattresses or sleeping bags to make their staying more comfortable. However, many, if not the majority, of homeless individuals do not. They sleep on thin cardboard layers, which are placed directly on the surface of the pavement.



Illustration 9: Homeless individual sleeping rough on thin cardboard layers

The aspect related to helping the urban poor is linked with the second characteristic implied by McGuirk's account: "what matters is the effect, not the *reference to this point is at p. 29.*

aesthetics.”<sup>69</sup> During one of the project presentations held in the occasion of the *Giornata Mondiale di Lotta alle Povertà*<sup>70</sup> (literally World Action Day Against Poverty) in October 2015 in Rome, one of the attendees challenged me about the aesthetic appearance of the object. She asked me whether the materiality and shape of the object could prevent individuals from utilising tait. My reply explained that the scope of the object was not to be aesthetically pleasant. Rather, it symbolically had to represent the life condition of people who are homeless'. Tait's scope is to be socially provocative, questioning some of the sociocultural prior assumptions that persist in questions concerning homelessness and public space.

Chapter 8 will describe tait as a *provotype*. This portmanteau term has been utilised by scholars in design De Boer and Donovan to describe provoking prototypes that “expose and embody tensions that surround a field of interest to support collaborative analysis and collaborative design explorations across stakeholders [i.e. rough sleepers, passers-by, charitable bodies].”<sup>71</sup> The aim of this methodological tool is to define the conditions within which involved stakeholders may act, which is, ultimately, the third aspect that characterises the attitude of an activist architect.<sup>72</sup> The activist architect's practice is concerned with the possibility that his/her intervention may manufacture a network, by delineating the possible actions and by giving agency to the involved range of stakeholders. With tait, this happens by virtue of the way cardboard was intended. Aspects of precarity that were previously analysed informed the decision to adopt such material. In fact, cardboard may be said to be fragile. It is a precarious material that invokes the necessity that people, while utilising tait, must take care of it. In doing so, in the form of a dialogue with spectres, each user makes the object available for a remote and unknown other.

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69 Ibid. p. 32

70 I was invited to present the project by FOCUS, Casa dei Diritti Sociali Roma. FOCUS is a charitable body in Rome dealing with issues concerning migration, homelessness and housing.

71 Boer, Donovan, and Buur, “Challenging Industry Conceptions with Provotypes.” p. 74.

72 McGuirk, *Radical Cities : Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture*.

### **2.1.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the trajectories and the research perspective that defined the lines of enquiry followed in this thesis. It also prompted the introduction and analysis of some of the key concepts, i.e. performativity, events, precarity, relation with the unfamiliar other, master-slave dialectic, disposition and dispossession, and agency, that will be elaborated further in the progression of this research work. The brief presentation of tait has also outlined the role played by the researcher. The project attempts to construct the conditions within which other social actors may act in order to challenge questions of inclusivity, public space and homelessness.

The next two chapters will complete the presentation of the qualitative data collected. In particular, Chapter 3 will present the literary review of the accounts provided by several scholars on public space in questions of inclusivity. Chapter 4 will illustrate the ethnographical work carried out and also discuss some architectural and activist interventions to support homeless people.



### 3 Questioning Public Space



In the introductory chapter, I discussed how the analysis of the body of literature around the topic of public space and inclusivity is rather partial. In other words, from the point of view of architectural studies these contributions require to be analysed together in order to highlight all the shades and nuances around the topic of inclusivity and the way public space is conceived, perceived and utilised in everyday life. Chapter 3 aims to analyse these theoretical contributions, outlining how on the one hand the several definitions provided offer only partial readings of the modality through which urban spaces should be conceived and intended in terms of inclusivity. On the other hand, through different spatial readings, the chapter highlights how public space is an intricate conflation of activities that change constantly as each and every day goes by. This in turn implies that public space should be rather conceived of as an ecology of individuals, which poses questions concerning the relationship between a static conception of architectural space and a dynamic use of it, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

In particular, the analysis shall begin with a discussion on public space as an outdoor room, which was criticised by scholar in architecture Gil Doron in early 2000 as rather exclusionary and composed by ideas of confinement and boundaries. However, the criticism offered by Doron, although it outlines how certain urban practices, i.e. the inhabitation of public space by people who are homeless, cannot be excluded from those activities that shape public space, is rather partial. It does not include the part of city-dwellers, who legitimately, may claim for a use of public space which is clean from practices that result in having a detrimental effect on the perception of it.

The theme inherent in the inhabitation of public space by people who are homeless shifts the analysis onto the relationship between private and public behaviours. Consequently, this moves the analysis from intending public space as an outdoor room into an indoor space. The investigation will take into account Judith Butler's analysis of Hannah Arendt's public sphere. Here Butler claims that the private sphere, what is largely supposed to be kept within domestic walls, is reproduced into the public, sharpening the distance between these two spheres and affecting the way public spaces should be used by city-dwellers. The idea of

public space as the reproduction of an interior room raises questions concerning the adoption of so called hostile architecture. By deploying scarcity, hostile architecture aims to produce anti-homeless public spaces.

The concluding section highlights how these partial readings cannot offer productive and operational grounds upon which it is possible to envision interventions that aim to manufacture processes of inclusion and reciprocal interaction among social actors. The purpose of the final section is investigate contributions and analyses of public space that offer a more fluid interpretation of the way public space is shaped. By starting from scholar in architecture Andrew Ballantyne's account on public space as a fluid and multi-faceted realm, the analysis will link this account with the work of scholar in digital design Martijn de Waal. In his analyses of the city's urban space, de Waal unveils different modalities through which practices and behaviours should be analysed. These are rather loose. Framed within the specific aspect of inhabitation of public space, de Waal's analysis offers the possibility to revisit concepts such as marginality and boundaries. Rather than thinking about these two words in terms of confinement, the analysis will appeal for a fluid intending of them, which cannot be unbound from the spatial context in which the array of everyday practices take place.

### **3.1.1 Public Space as an “Outdoor Room”**

Is public space a type of exclusionary space? In early 2000 a group of scholars from the University of Greenwich in London known as Transgressive Architecture created a series of projects that challenged this aspect related to public space. In particular they were interested in challenging not just the space but the public component of space as proposed by the Urban Task Force led by Lord Rogers. The Urban Task Force was a group of British architects and scholars whose aim was to identify causes of urban decline across England regarded as being the cause of urban depopulation from cities. Their work was focused on promoting design strategies that could possibly trigger urban regeneration processes and their activity resulted in a document making over a hundred recommendations. These included modalities for recycling land and buildings,

improving the urban environment, delivering regeneration processes, managing resources and infrastructure.<sup>73</sup> However, for the purpose of this section I will focus on the way public space was described and intended by the Urban Task Force, “an outdoor room within a neighbourhood.”<sup>74</sup> This definition was in fact challenged by Transgressive Architecture and particularly by one of its members, scholar in architecture Gil Doron.

According to Transgressive Architecture's members, the use of the outdoor room metaphor to describe public space already entailed notions of exclusivity and confinement. Associating public space with words such as door or room, as Doron contends, frames public space within the idea of boundaries that cannot be overcome. Moreover, giving public space a domestic connotation may imply aspects related to gender, political, social and cultural exclusion.<sup>75</sup> Hence, Transgressive Architecture carried out a series of projects, namely street art installations, called *Bad Sheet* that were meant to raise awareness on the notion of public in the use of urban spaces while shedding light on the range of diverse urban practices, i.e. homelessness, that share public space but that were excluded by the Urban Task Force's analysis.<sup>76</sup>



Illustration 10: Bed Sheet Project. Image courtesy Transgressive Architecture

In fact the group led by Lord Rogers had specified a set of uses that the public space as an outdoor room had to be designed for: “from outdoor eating to street entertainment; from sport and play areas to a venue for civic or political

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73 Force, *Towards an Urban Renaissance: The Report of the Urban Task Force Chaired by Lord Rogers of Riverside; Executive Summary*.

74 From Doron, M. Gil, “Transgressive Architecture – Testing the Boundaries of Inclusiveness.” p. 4

75 Doron, M. Gil.

76 Doron, “The Bad Sheets.”

functions; and most importantly of all as a place for walking or sitting-out.”<sup>77</sup> This description, according Gil Doron entailed two conclusions: one, it assumed the public as an homogeneous, stable and fixed entity, which is prone to using public space only for leisure activities and according to standardised demands, needs and desires. Two, the intending of public space only for leisure activities turned it into a mono-functional type of space.

In his article, *The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression*, Gil Doron contends that so called *transgressive practices*, i.e. rough sleeping, street art, street gardening, which were excluded from the list of activities in Urban Task Force's analysis, contribute to the making of an heterogeneous type of public space.<sup>78</sup> According to Doron, envisioning public space only for leisure activities underlies the fact that streets are turned into mono-functional spaces, serving the sole scope of transportation tools. Conversely, *transgressive practices*, as Doron writes, “transform the street from a ‘non-place’ into a ‘place’.”<sup>79</sup> By displacing activities such as sleeping, eating and meeting that are supposed to be accepted in other places, i.e. within domestic walls, these activities transgress the boundaries set for the use of public space. They question why some practices are regarded as public and others as private. More importantly, they put into question which public these spaces are designed for.<sup>80</sup>

In fact, one of the most important aspects when it comes to analysing public space is the term public and what this implies. Doron's criticism of public space as an outdoor room highlights the difference between activities that are supposed to be kept private and others that may be displayed publicly. Additionally, it should be noted how the scholar, although his analysis gives credit to urban practices that were excluded from the Urban Task Force's work, does not take into account the possible reception by other social actors that the display of other practices such as panhandling or rough sleeping may produce. In order to

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77 Doron, M. Gil, “Transgressive Architecture – Testing the Boundaries of Inclusiveness.” p. 3

78 Doron, “The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression.”

79 Doron. p. 254 Although it is not explicitly mentioned in Doron's article, the notion of non-place has been developed by sociologist Marc Augé in his book *Non-Places*. See Augé, *Non-Places*. A second useful source to analyse public space and its perception by city-dwellers is the study carried out by urbanist Kevin Lynch. See Lynch, *The Image of the City*.

80 Doron, “The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression.”

develop these points, the analysis requires to move the notion of public space from being conceived of as an outdoor space to an indoor room.

### 3.1.2 Public Space as an Indoor Space

Philosopher Judith Butler's analysis of Hannah Arendt's public sphere outlines how public space is determined by the reproduction of the private sphere into it. Arendt's notion of public space, which seems to recall the one of an ancient Greek polis, concerns the notion of space as political, in the sense that individuals' actions and practices manifested publicly become, or better, can be effectively conceived of as a form of speaking and language. This political activity takes place within a *space of appearance*, a space-in-between bodies that allows individuals to appear performatively to one another.<sup>81</sup> It was based on the idea that public space is a type of space where political activities and citizens can meet one another, discussing opinions, sharing different lifestyles and looking for possible collective solutions to problems.<sup>82</sup>

However, according to Butler, Arendt's organisation of public space also seems to show that "a power operates prior to any performative power exercised by a plurality".<sup>83</sup> This is due to the reproduction of the private sphere into public space:

*the private sphere supported the public sphere of action and thought, but in [Arendt's] view the political had to be defined by action, including the active sense of speaking. [...] Those who entered into the public did so from the private sphere, so the public sphere depended fundamentally on the reproduction of the private.*<sup>84</sup>

In effect, a confirmation of this brief description of public space as indoor space and particularly of space-in-between in which there is already a prior power operating can be made by considering the example of Bernard Tschumi's project for Le Fresnoy National Studio for Contemporary Arts. This was a redevelopment project, involving a series of pre-existent buildings. Onto these buildings, Tschumi overlapped a new structure, a second roof which covered the

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81 Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street."

82 Butler.

83 Butler. p. 3

84 Butler, "Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life? Adorno Prize Lecture." p. 12

pre-existent buildings.<sup>85</sup> This operation produced a space-in-between, a surplus space that was not initially included in the design brief. According to Tschumi, this surplus portion of intervention implied that “[s]ince this space was not included in the client’s program and had no measurable cost, we [but also customers] were free to do whatever we [and they] wanted.”<sup>86</sup> The project therefore consisted of a mixed type of space, one that was organised to second the design brief and client’s demands, and a second surplus space. This, by being unbound from the client’s necessities, was intended to grant architecture users a great deal of freedom in the form of unpredictable actions, practices and uses that should have taken place within it. However, as noted by architecture scholar Jonathan Hill, the space-in-between in Le Fresnoy cannot be said to be fully un-programmed. In this respect Hill suggests that Tschumi’s awareness of the type of in-between-space he designed, turned users into passive consumers. Although customers inside the surplus space may “display constructional and conceptual creativity,”<sup>87</sup> Tschumi’s awareness of its potentiality implies that the user is not behaving freely but effectively s/he is passive.

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85 With regards to the description of this project see also: Tschumi, *Architecture Concepts : Red Is Not a Color*.

86 Contained in Hill, *Actions of Architecture : Architects and Creative Users*, p. 81

87 Hill, *Actions of Architecture : Architects and Creative Users*.



Illustration 11: Le Fresnoy National Studio for Contemporary Arts. Source BernardTschumi.com

To come back to Butler's analysis, it is possible to assert that the reproduction of the private sphere into public space determines a differentiation of the two spheres. The private sphere becomes the place where individuals are almost free to do whatever they want. Conversely, public space becomes a type of space where individuals must respect a prescribed set of rules so that they do not hurt the other.<sup>88</sup> However, this implies that the exercise of practices in public is uniformed to one language, which is borrowed from the private sphere. In fact, Arendt's example of ancient Greek polis as a form of plurality in the organisation of public life is questioned further by Butler. The ancient Greek polis, Butler contends, was not organised to accept other languages than Greek. Rather, the polis was organised through monolingualism. Those who did not speak Greek were regarded either as barbarians or foreigners and therefore excluded from participation in public life. Within this political system, slaves were the point of convergence between a private sphere where they were owned by the master and an exclusive public sphere. Slaves had no value and were regarded as speaking

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88 See, Žižek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category."

an incomprehensible language. Their action and practices, as Butler argues, were *pre-political*: their presence remained on the threshold of public life, where however, their practices kept haunting public space.<sup>89</sup>

### 3.1.3 Anti-Homeless Public Space

To frame this analysis within the specific topic of this doctoral thesis, it is possible to link Butler's arguments concerning the exclusion of languages that did not form part of the public with the adoption of specific anti-homeless regulatory policies, which in turn aim to produce anti-homeless public spaces.

Scholar in criminology and urban policies James Petty contends that the condition of inhabiting public space does not only transgress prescribed sets of uses. Rather, it threatens the meaning through which public space is constructed, which consequently determines conditions of exclusion and, eventually the creation of anti-homeless public spaces. Hence, Petty argues that the adoption of private behaviours such as sleeping, urinating or eating in public by people who are homeless lead the regulatory responses to be ones that aim to “prevent that disruption of meaning by displacing its source, often by rendering such spaces unusable or uninhabitable for the homeless.”<sup>90</sup> Here, Petty is specifically referencing his analysis to the use of so-called hostile architecture, notably the use

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89 From this last account it is possible to understand the decision to adopt an approach based on the consultation of spectres, which was described in Chapter 2. In this respect, this research has considered the engagement with both homeless and housed individuals as a dialogue with the dead. As it was described in Chapter 2, spectres are neither the other in the sense that his/her language is incomprehensible. Nor is s/he a screen where to project fantasies and desires concerning presumed necessities. In light of the analysis carried out so far, this aspect may be said to involve both housed and unhoused individuals, who remain passive social actors. This makes them acquire the traits of slaves who are provided only with a capacity of taking what is given to them. See also Agamben, *L'uso Dei Corpi. Homo Sacer*, IV, 2. In the development of the argument on slaves, Agamben asserts that these are not provided with *ergon*, referring to the notion of slave described by Aristotle. The slave, for Aristotle, is not provided with this energy. S/he is instead “part of the master. [...] By using his body, the slave is, himself, used by the master, and, by using the body of the slave, the master actually uses his body.” The slave has a body that does not possess any energy and a soul that is not moved by any drives. As Agamben writes: “it [the soul] seems similar to fire. If in fact one throws something into, the fire devours it; however, if we do not throw anything, the fire is not driven to take it.”

90 Petty, “The London Spikes Controversy: Homelessness, Urban Securitisation and the Question of ‘Hostile Architecture.’” p. 71



of spikes<sup>91</sup> to prevent people who are homeless (but I would include also other social actors, e.g. tourists) from lying or sitting down in specific areas of the city.<sup>92</sup> From the point of view of policy making, the adoption of such regulatory tools by City Councils support the argument that the meaning of public space is constructed by consumeristic drives, an aspect that echoes the Urban Task Force's vision of public space discussed above.<sup>93</sup>

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91 These are described by Petty as “one-inch metal studs protruding from the ground.” Ibid. p. 76

92 As described in Chapter 1, the use of anti-homeless policies is not limited to the adoption of spikes. It may comprises the adoption of policies by City Councils that implies the confiscation of homeless people's belonging and the application of fines, or the adoption of anti-beggar advertising campaigns. This case in particular, will be described in the next chapter. Additionally, the adoption of anti-homeless architecture prevents other social activities that were included into Urban Task Force's set of uses for public space.

93 Petty, “The London Spikes Controversy: Homelessness, Urban Securitisation and the Question of ‘Hostile Architecture’”; Doron, M. Gil, “Transgressive Architecture – Testing the Boundaries of Inclusiveness”; Of particular interest is the analysis carried out by scholar in visual culture Richard Williams, which describes the historical moment in which also Transgressive Architecture operated their protest actions. See Williams, *The Anxious City: English Urbanism in the Late Twentieth Century*.

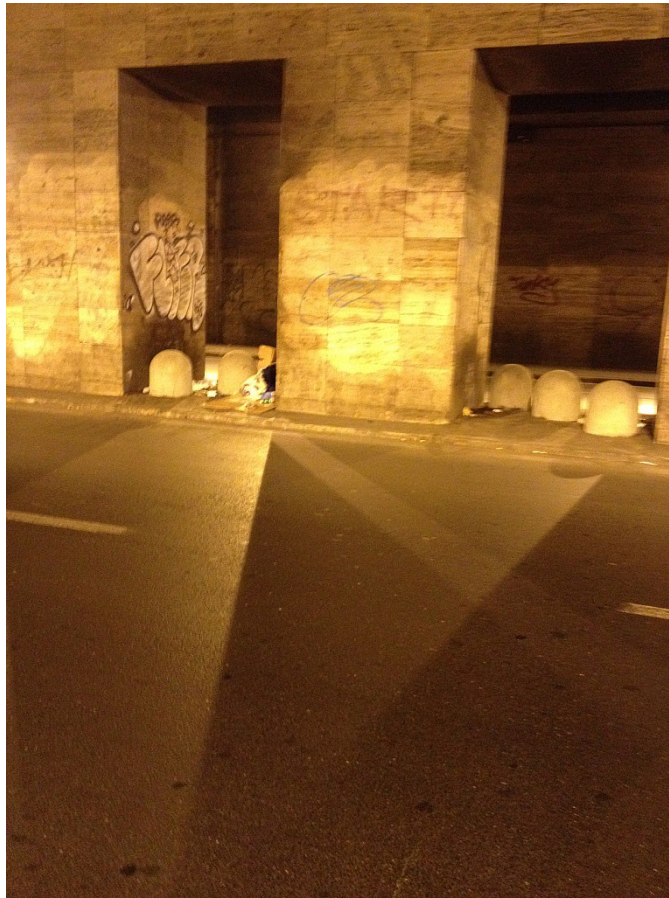


Illustration 12: Hostile architecture in Rome.

Expert in law and anti-homeless regulatory policies Elizabeth Wilson argues that the removal of homeless people from public space is not intended to tackle the issue of urban poverty. Rather, it is intended to prefer business owners and tourists against economically disadvantaged members of the community. As she maintains, “[b]ecause [homeless people] often do not own property or pay taxes, anti-homeless legislation has restricted their access to public space.”<sup>94</sup> This is motivated, as Wilson reports, because the perception of homeless individuals on street has detrimental effects on shops with pedestrians preferring to avoid these areas.<sup>95</sup> This also includes aspects related to safety and sanitation. In fact,

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<sup>94</sup> Wilson, “Cracking Down on the Down and Out: The Criminalization of Homelessness.” p. 4

<sup>95</sup> From the article, I have got the impression that data are not supported by a specific investigation. However, what sustained by Wilson are confirmed by the findings from the interviews I carried out. These will be presented in the next chapter.

activities such as public urination or panhandling determine individuals who are homeless to be regarded as a threat to legitimate requests for more quality and conservation of well-being in certain areas of the city, performed by taxpayers.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, as Wilson concludes, the adoption of these legislative tools also establishes a condition of inequality between people who are homeless and who are not. Inherently, while the second have restroom facilities in their own houses or workplaces, homeless people do not.

### 3.1.4 Scarcity

The analysis carried out so far has moved the notion of public space from being an outdoor room to an interior space. A confirmation that public space is effectively an indoor room can be made by linking the argument concerning the use of hostile agencies to prevent individuals who are homeless to use specific areas of the city and the production of scarcity. Scarcity is, according to Jon Goodbun, Michael Klein and Andreas Rumfhuber and Jeremy Till in the book *The Design of Scarcity*, a “deliberate restriction of the use of [public] space.”<sup>97</sup> In this respect, public space is better described through the use of a different metaphor. The scholars suggest that this is composed of corridors and doors. While the metaphorical image of corridors may set up social relations and encounters, allowing people to navigate through space (and in this respect this definition would require additional explanations regarding the type of relationship among social actors), the presence of doors signals a restriction. Doors metaphorically represent a set of prescribed uses for specific spaces, restricting and controlling the access to them. In other words, the idea that public space is composed by doors make the admittance to it scarce. This appears clear in two telling examples, both from the city of Rome. One concerns the provision of public restroom services while the second concerns the use of a public park.

Embrice 2030, a not for profit organisation, in 2015 produced a report concerning the condition and availability of such services. From their work, it appears that the majority of public toilets in Rome are either closed or subjected

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Jon Goodbun et al., *The Design of Scarcity*. p. 29

to charge, affecting particularly people who are homeless, who cannot afford to pay for these services.<sup>98</sup> A similar argument was discussed during one of the encounters I had with Caritas Roma. Alberto Colaiacomo, communication manager for Caritas Roma, pointed out how homeless people in Rome do not in fact lack provision of food but access to public toilets. On the one hand, he insisted on the necessity of providing these services to people who are homeless. On the other hand, he also outlined difficulties concerning the possibility of opening public toilettes for homeless individuals. According to Colaiacomo, this was due to resistance by city-dwellers who do not wish to have their local area eventually turned into a congregational place for homeless people.

Another telling example is the proposal that Marco Diaco, Five Star Movement Rome city councillor, had with regard to a community of people who are homeless and their use of Colle Oppio, an urban public park nearby the Colosseum. Diaco appealed to Caritas Roma to stop providing evening meals to the community of homeless individuals who gather in this urban park. Local newspapers reported that, according to Diaco, the presence of this community in the park was detrimental for the quality of that public space, which requires more public money to be spent to clean the park from homeless people's evidence of their staying there. Moreover, following the idea that the presence of people who are homeless was perceived as threatening, complaints came from local residents who used to take their children to play in the park. The proposal, which following an aftermath of hostile responses was eventually withdrawn by Diaco, intended that Caritas would stop providing evening meals to the community of homeless people in the park, in the attempt to force them to leave the area in the evening and find meals elsewhere.<sup>99</sup>

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98 Embrice 2030 is a not for profit organisation based in Rome. Maria Spina, architect and members of Embrice 2030 led the research on the presence of public toilettes in Rome. The results of this investigation however were published only in Embrice2030 official website.

99 By contrast, it seems plausible to affirm that in the context of St Peter's Square and the Vatican area, Pope Francis' decision to install restroom facilities for homeless people nearby Bernini's colonnade, is aimed at constructing a meaning of public space that does not only pursue consumeristic or tourist-related meanings. Rather, it seems to advocate for a sense of hospitality and solidarity towards the urban poor in the city.

### 3.1.5 Individual, collective and relational public spaces

In the previous sections the analysis on public space has shifted its focus from an idea of outdoor room to one of indoor room. Analysed within the optic of inhabitation of public space by homeless people, both these two scenarios outlined a series of limitations. These do not only comprise the exclusionary aspects that concern the relationship between practices related to homelessness and the more consumerist drives that shape public space. Rather, these limitations regard also the gaze through which public space has been investigated, which reveals only partial readings of the way urban spaces are experienced by city-dwellers in everyday life. Additionally, the analysis carried out so far poses questions concerning the role city-dwellers may play in shaping the city's public spaces, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. On the contrary, this section appeals for a much wider modality to read and possibly analyse public space and the social actors who contribute to shaping it.

Previously, Doron's work on the definition of the public component of space emphasised the necessity of not considering it as a stable entity. In more recent years scholar in architecture Andrew Ballantyne has developed similar arguments concerning the possibility of intending the public not as a stable entity that navigates through urban spaces. His analysis, which appeals for a multi-perspective way of looking at the way the city is experienced by city-dwellers, argues that the public should rather be intended as fluid and multi-faceted.<sup>100</sup> A clear example is offered by Doron when he mentions the possible different experience of public space between individuals who own a flat and who not, i.e. homeless people. A similar aspect was also briefly introduced above when I commented on the difference between those individuals who have access to restroom facilities and those who do not. Hence, according to Ballantyne, owning a flat offers a sense of safety. It implies that these individuals are not worried about self-defence or where to spend the night. Conversely, individuals who do not own a flat and inhabit public space experience this rather differently. A person who faces homelessness may look at the city in terms of safety and privacy, worrying about where and to spend the night or s/he may look at city

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<sup>100</sup> Ballantyne, "The Unit of Survival."

spaces in economic terms, by seeking places with a large number of passers-by in the daytime, and so on.<sup>101</sup> In other words, the intending of public space solely in terms of relationship between private and public sphere may appear restrictive. Rather, the modality through which public space has to be looked at should integrate the range of possible different needs and demands performed by the contingency of social actors within it. This includes the fact that the experience and the set of uses of public space are not fixed but changeable terms. These are the arguments explored by scholar in digital design Martijn de Waal in the book *the City as Interface: how new media are changing the city*.

In his book, de Waal investigates two contrasting ideas of city, which recalls those encountered in the development of this chapter: *the libertarian city*, which is mostly based on individualistic drives. This as de Waal points out “functions as a market [and] offers a great deal of freedom, but that freedom is also so free of commitment that it can ultimately lead to far-reaching fragmentation and segregation, both culturally and economically.”<sup>102</sup> By contrast, de Waal also presents the city as a communitarian society. In this case public space is based on “an unambiguous shared culture, [which] is too coercive and offers little individual freedom.”<sup>103</sup> The possible third stance envisioned by the scholar is *the republican city*. This is an intermediate position between the two discussed above, which works according to a variable notion of public and that will constitute the basis for the core concepts discusses in Chapter 8.

In particular, the argument raised by de Waal seems to contrast with Butler's analysis of the relationship between private and public spheres in which the reproduction of the first into public life emphasises the distance between the two spheres. Hence, in his analysis private and public sphere are not so clear-cut and are substituted by two other terms: public and parochial domains.<sup>104</sup> The term parochial domain or sphere is intended as an intermediate position between the notions of private and public sphere discussed above. In particular, as asserted by

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101 Ibid. See also Coyne, “Re-Making the City.”

102 de Waal, *The City as Interface: How Digital Media Are Changing the City*. p. 10

103 Ibid. p. 10

104 de Waal, *The City as Interface: How Digital Media Are Changing the City*. De Waal borrows these two terms from American sociologist Lyn Lofland's work on the topic, which however was not analysed directly by myself.

de Waal, the parochial sphere describes “those places in a city where we mainly meet like-minded people.”<sup>105</sup> An example of parochial sphere or domain may be the portico area in St Peter's Square, which is utilised and shared by a community of people who are homeless as a congregational and sheltered area to sleep over night. Parochial domains, as de Waal maintains, are generally accessible to outsiders, who however may be looked at with some suspicion. In fact, to establish a sense of trust with the community of homeless people, it took more than just one encounter. The parochial sphere is coupled with a second sphere, the public domain, described as the space within a city “where we mainly come across strangers whom we either do not know at all or whom we only know as members of a category.”<sup>106</sup> The public domain implies the presence of individuals, who eventually have to find ways to relate one with the other in public space while the parochial sphere comprises a contingency of activities that are carried out by a group of people collectively.

However, public domains and parochial spheres are neither unmatchable nor fixed. Rather they often overlap and mingle with each other. As de Waal maintains, it is possible to affirm that a public domain is not separated from the parochial spheres that are part of it and that change constantly.<sup>107</sup>

In effect, by taking back the specific example of the portico area in St Peter's Square, it is possible to say that this space comprises and hosts a variety of parochial spheres. From the side of homeless people, the space is used as a sheltered area to sleep over night. At the same time, the presence of a large number of people in the day time makes this place become economically valuable, a spot to receive donations from other passers-by. Hence, the portico area is utilised by people who belong to other parochial spheres as tourists or clergy. There are people who work in the shops nearby, police officers and other passers-by who step-by in the area to reach other destinations. Together, these city-dwellers may be said to form a public domain within a specific spatial context. Additionally, it may be noted how belonging to a parochial sphere may change according to factors such as a specific time of the day. This implies that, in

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. 15

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 16

<sup>107</sup> de Waal, *The City as Interface: How Digital Media Are Changing the City*.

terms of spatial analysis of practices, behaviours are volatile, elusive and confusing, with subjects that may acquire membership in more than one social sphere.<sup>108</sup> Hence, at night, the practices that are carried out by individuals who inhabit the portico depend on the fact that they face homelessness. Conversely, in the daytime, homeless individuals who stay underneath the portico area, as noted by sociologist Cameron Parsell, may adopt passive and docile behaviours in order to augment the possibility of receiving donations from passers-by.<sup>109</sup> These aspects were observed while carrying out ethnographical studies with the community of people who are homeless in the portico area in St Peter's Square. In fact, they adopt a series of behaviours, which may be defined as survival tactics, that consist of tidying up the place in the morning by collecting their belongings and cardboard into black rubbish bags. These are then left at the corners of the portico. In this respect, the traces of homeless people's staying underneath the portico are masked and somehow secured from public exposure. Additionally, for those who remain in the area during the daytime, they also work to keep the space clean, e.g. by using empty crisp cans as ashtrays.

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108 This aspect is particularly borrowed from the analysis on the concept of marginality and boundary objects. See Star and Griesemer, "Institutional Ecology, translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39." In the paper they analyse the use of so called boundary objects. These present properties and characteristics that make them acquire different meanings in different social spheres while maintaining a coherent structure which is common and recognisable among the subjects who come across boundary objects. One of the main concepts related to boundary objects is the notion of marginality, the relationship that subjects may have with boundary objects. Marginality, according to the scholars, refers to individuals who have membership in more than one social sphere.

109 Parsell, "Homeless Identities: Enacted and Ascribed."





Illustration 13: Homeless people's belongings collected at the corners of the portico area in St Peter's Square



Illustration 14: The can used as an ashtray in the portico area in St Peter's Square

According to sociologist Samuel Perry, the possibility of oscillating among more than one parochial sphere is emancipative. It may be said to open individuals to having different sets of social relations with other, different citizens and even contributing to distancing homeless individuals from the possibility of being considered as such.<sup>110</sup> However, I would argue that the limitation of this claim lies in the fact that these behaviours remain mostly invisible to the majority of passers-by and city-dwellers. In other words, on the one hand behaviours such as the cleaning up of the space of the portico every morning may be said to contribute to making that space accessible, by avoiding any detrimental effect that the inhabitation of it may cause. On the other hand, I argue that the perception of homeless individuals is not affected in any emancipative way because the portico area and the activities that contribute to shaping it remain substantially independent of one another.

### 3.1.6 Summaries

The analysis carried out in this chapter has outlined the necessity of examining and intending public space in more inclusive terms. The analysis of it cannot consider solely one particular activity or segment of social actors. Rather it should entail the whole spectrum of behaviours and practices that give form to everyday activities in public space. What the previous section has outlined is that the city's urban spaces should be regarded neither as an outdoor nor as an interior room. Rather, public space is a type of flexible and transformable space hosting a variety of practices and behaviours that are ingrained within specific spatial contexts.

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<sup>110</sup> Sociologist Samuel Perry has analysed the relationship between specific spatial contexts and the presence of individuals who face homelessness. In his study, which was specifically referred to the use of a donut shop in Chicago by homeless and housed individuals throughout the day, the scholar asserts that this spatial context can be described as a “hybrid space.” In this respect, a hybrid space as described by Perry “provides a unique social and physical context by which the homeless residents may establish and express a ‘patron identity’ – meaning the identity of someone who has a residence, employment, autonomy, legitimate reasons for occupying the [space], and is associated with other such people.” In other words, the donut shop does not only serve the function of being a shop for housed individuals while representing a congregational and sheltered area for homeless people. Rather, the fact homeless people who orbit around it provides also to clean up that space may concur to have emancipative effects. See Perry, “Urban Hybrid Space and the Homeless.” p. 439 (9)

The analysis carried out in this chapter also forms the basis for the investigation that will be carried out in the next chapter. While this chapter has mainly focused on the analysis concerning the conception of public space and the modality through which it is possible to read its functioning, the analysis in Chapter 4 will focus on the perception of homelessness by different social actors. It will also list possible modalities to intervene in questions concerning the presence of homelessness in public spaces, outlining the necessity of questioning further the notion of inclusivity.



## 4 Contextualising Public Space and Homelessness

In the previous chapter, the interpretation of the body of literature concerning public space demonstrated the necessity of a more integrated body of analysis: one that combines the literary review of public space in discourses of inclusion with evidence from field observations and interviews. Hence in the introduction to this thesis, it was reported how either a direct engagement with people who are homeless or with other social actors seemed not to be present in the several contributions that were analysed.

Therefore, starting from Perry's analysis concerning hybrid urban spaces in relation to the presence of people who are homeless, the chapter will analyse this argument in the specific context of St Peter's Square porticoes. On the one hand I agree with Perry's hypothesis: within the context of homelessness and inhabitation of public space, certain practices such as tidying and cleaning up the portion of public space that is inhabited throughout the day may trigger emancipative processes of social inclusion towards its homeless inhabitants. On the other hand, this hypothesis poses three questions: are these contributions spontaneous? Or rather, do they depend on external circumstances? Consequently, are these practices acknowledged and recognised by other city-dwellers who are not homeless?

As regards the first two questions, the chapter will highlight how practices such as cleaning and tidying up the space of the portico in St Peter's Square can be regarded as survival tactics. In other words, these tactics are aimed at granting a right to stay underneath the portico by the community of homeless inhabitants. Consequently, this aspect may also be linked with what Žižek has defined as merciful totalitarianism- a form of tolerance towards people who are homeless, who can be removed from the space at any time. Additionally, the concept of merciful totalitarianism invites us to reflect upon the array of services offered by charitable bodies towards people who face homelessness. These are regarded as controversial, surely representing forms of merciful help. However, they may deprive homeless people of autonomy and even cause addiction to the provision of such services.<sup>111</sup>

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111 Braga, "racCONTAMI 2014: 1° indagine point in time dei senza fissa dimora a Roma Primi risultati."

With regards to the third question, answering this entails eliciting the perceptions held by housed individuals of people who are homeless on the street. In this respect an emblematic example is one that was told to me during a focus group I had with people who used to serve with me at the charitable project run by the Sisters of Mercy in Edinburgh.<sup>112</sup> During the focus group, the interviewees reported how the perception of the same person in the context of the Convent, where the project takes place, was significantly different from when this person was encountered on the street. With this in mind, by firstly taking into account the work of Italian philosopher Benedetto de Carolis and then Žižek, the section will examine how the Convent allows charitable helpers to operate a projection of what reality offers into a form of game.<sup>113</sup> By contrast, in public space this projection involves desires into reality.<sup>114</sup>

Is it possible to say that people who are homeless become vanished voices once they end up living on the street?

With this metaphorical image in mind, the last argument developed in this chapter represents a conjunction between the two aspects mentioned above. It describes the protest action carried out in Nottingham by a group of protesters known as *FightBack*, which took place across December 2015 and January 2016. The case study provides a telling example of the challenges in support of homeless people. It also poses stimulating questions on the role of activism in relation to mediation. Analysed through the account offered by philosopher Michel Serres on parasitism and mediation, the section will highlight how the main goal of this protest action was to give voice to people who are homeless in Nottingham. However, it is also possible to claim that these forms of protest actions end up turning the homeless individuals involved into passive subjects, failing to manufacture effective processes of inclusion.

In the concluding section, the chapter invites the reader to reflect upon inclusion and what this implies. This thesis is developed upon the assumption that inclusive public space necessitates acknowledged and recognised forms of

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112 The name of the project is Homeless Project. See Chapter 2.

113 De Carolis, *Il paradosso antropologico : nicchie, micromondi e dissociazione psichica*.

114 Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

contribution to the construction of public space. This involves a rethinking of both the mechanisms that constitute public space as much as of the modalities with which it is possible to intervene in space to manufacture inclusion.

#### 4.1.1 Rough Sleeping in St Peter's Square Portico

Between December 2014 and September 2015, there were 10 encounters with the community of people who are rough sleepers in St Peter's Square. These were intended to clarify aspects related to inhabiting and rough sleeping in public space that were only partially addressed by the literature on the theme, with the exclusion of research from the field of sociology.

In particular, the initial aspect I was interested in understanding was concerned with the meaning attributed to the portico area by its homeless inhabitants. This is not deemed as home, rather as a “safe refuge”.<sup>115</sup> In this respect, already sociologist Cameron Parsell has outlined how people who are homeless do not consider the space they inhabit as home.<sup>116</sup> This, according to Parsell, is related to the desire to have a physical home. However, Parsell's research seems to emphasise that most of the homeless individuals interviewed

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<sup>115</sup> The term safe refuge was introduced during the second encounter with the community of homeless people in St Peter's Square by Mauro. It took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 2014. The interview included mainly 4 people, Mauro, Pietro, Stefano and Barbara. The scope of the encounter was to establish a first direct contact with the community and to understand aspects related to the inhabitation of the portico. Mauro was the only Italian homeless who inhabited the portico area at that time. I am aware he is currently in Sicily where he managed to find a job as a farmer.

<sup>116</sup> Parsell, “Home Is Where the House Is: The Meaning of Home for People Sleeping Rough.” In this sense, the analysis and observations that were carried out seem to agree with what suggested by sociologist Cameron Parsell. The investigation conducted by Parsell highlights three main aspects concerning the meaning of home to people who face homelessness: home as control, home as a family and home as a feeling. The first aspect describes the feeling of control exercised by individuals when feeling at home. Home, in other words, allows individuals to have control over determinant aspect of day-to-day life. In this respect, home embodies the private sphere, which, as previously described, grants individuals a certain freedom in the form of behaviours. By contrast, this does not happen in public space, where individuals have to control their behaviour not to bother the others. The second aspect related to feeling at home is concerned with the presence of familiar others. Feeling at home is when one feels a sense of safety and comfort when surrounded by other individuals. The third aspect is related to the first, feeling at home implies a certain degree of control. This admits that feeling at home involves the possibility of having the autonomy to exercise forms of control.



declared that they do not feel safe in public space. By contrast, the impression I developed while interviewing the community of homeless people in St Peter's Square pointed in the opposite direction. In fact, these individuals felt relatively safe in the space of the portico. This is mainly due to two aspects: one, the presence of other individuals who are homeless. Two, the constant presence of police nearby.



Illustration 15: One of the encounters with the community of homeless people in St Peter's Square



Illustration 16: Individual sleeping on cardboard nearby St Peter's Square

With regards to the first point, Chapter 2 has already considered how precarious life conditions, such as those experienced by people who are homeless, bring about forms of mutual help and reciprocal collaboration. Effectively, not simply the social but also the spatial condition of inhabiting the street, particularly at night, necessitates the adoption of sharing practices. Sharing then concerns not solely material goods such as food, alcohol or tobacco. Rather it also involves forms of spatial sharing. Within this scenario, the relationships among these individuals appear to be consolidated and centred on an optic related to necessity,<sup>117</sup> i.e. of friendship, warmth, food and consequently safety.

The aspect related to safety is then directly linked with the presence of police nearby, which is evidently due to the proximity between the porticoes and the Vatican state. During the observations I was able to consider how the link between police presence and safety affects behaviours and practices underneath the portico, defining survival tactics that are mostly aimed at granting a right to

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<sup>117</sup> the body concerned solely with issues of survival, with the reproduction of material conditions and the satisfaction of basic needs, is not yet the 'political' body." See Butler, "Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life? Adorno Prize Lecture." p. 13.

permanence. These survival tactics consist of tidying up the place in the morning, by collecting homeless inhabitants' belongings and cardboard seemingly into black rubbish bags. These are then left at the corners of the portico with the aim of disguising homeless people's presence under an apparent mundanity.<sup>118</sup>

During two separate meetings I had with, respectively, Caritas Roma and Archbishop Konrad Krajewski, the Papal Almoner,<sup>119</sup> I was able to discuss this aspect relating to the different type of presence of people who are homeless between day and night time. Both Konrad Krajewski and Caritas outlined similar points of view:

*Caritas: there is the issue of seeing people who sleep rough! Public authorities, if they noticed that rough sleeping becomes permanent, I think it would make them react. Now it is tolerated...;*

*Archbishop Krajewski: we know these people come there [the portico area nearby St Peter's Square]. And you know, they could not be there but we [meaning police, street cleaners, Public Authorities] close our eyes...;*

According to the description made by both Caritas and Archbishop Krajewski, the operation of tidying up the space of the portico can be regarded more as a way to mask and somehow secure the nightly presence of people rough sleeping underneath the portico from public exposure in the day time. However, it is also possible to say how the survival tactics deployed by the community of homeless individuals underneath the portico area in St Peter's Square underlie the aspect related to tolerance. It seems that the permanence of people who are homeless underneath the portico area is up to the point it is not perceived as permanent.<sup>120</sup>

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118 In this respect, it appears interesting the account provided by Žižek concerning tolerant hegemonies. As he declares forms of tolerant hegemony may be said to put individuals subjected to it into a modality of adaptability where to play with rules is a condition of survival. See Žižek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category." p. 676

119 As stated in the website, "The Office of Papal Charities is the department of the Holy See charged with exercising charity to the poor in the name of the Holy Father". See [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/institutions\\_connected/elem\\_apost/documents/rc\\_elemosineria\\_pro\\_20121106\\_profile\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/institutions_connected/elem_apost/documents/rc_elemosineria_pro_20121106_profile_en.html)

120 During one of the encounters with the community of people who are homeless near St Peter's Square, I personally witnessed policemen asking homeless people underneath the portico to leave the space temporarily. This encounter happened in May 2015, the reason I was there was to collect data about the inhabitation of the portico in the day time and to observe the relationship between the community of people who are homeless and the rest of city dwellers.

Slavoj Žižek defines these types of attitude as forms of merciful totalitarianism. By recalling his personal experience during Tito's regime, the philosopher asserts that the use of restrictive rules was not aimed at establishing a regime of fear; rather, it was more due to an intention to transmit a merciful image. As Žižek points out, the message was: “[y]ou see, if we wanted, we could have all of you arrested and condemned, but do not be afraid, we are lenient.”<sup>121</sup> According to Žižek, this suspends the discourse between a condition of total incrimination - the homeless individuals can be removed at any time, and mercy - the fact that the community of homeless individuals can stay underneath the portico is not a consequence of their good practices or survival tactics. Rather it is the proof of the mercy of those in power, which underlies limitations akin to tolerance.<sup>122</sup>

A similar type of discourse can be moved from the context of the portico nearby St Peter's Square to the array of merciful services offered to people who are homeless. In fact, the access to night hostels and soup kitchens is also strictly regulated. During the encounters with homeless individuals, they reported to me how if a subject is drunk or has pets, that person is not allowed to enter any charitable body's premises. Additionally, when spending the night at charitable hostels, individuals would hardly have the possibility of sleeping next to their daily friends, which, quite paradoxically, was a condition regarded as unsafe (even more than sleeping rough in public space). Finally, with regards to such services, the investigation I carried out agrees with the findings of the report produced by Manuela Braga from Politecnico di Milano for the city of Rome. The findings of Braga's work outline how the provision of charitable services may diminish the self reliance and autonomy of people who are homeless, causing addiction.<sup>123</sup>

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There were no interviews in that occasion. The reason was a press conference, and police wanted the space of the portico to be clean from their presence.

121 Žižek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category.” p. 675

122 Žižek.

123 See Braga, “racCONTAMI 2014: 1° indagine point in time dei senza fissa dimora a Roma Primi risultati.” This aspects were also reported to me during a private conversation with Mauro, one of the occupants of St Peter's Square portico. This conversation took place in January 2015. The reason I was interviewing Mauro was to understand more what inhabiting public space implies and his relationship with charitable services. He stated the following: “it is not so hard after all. Of course, you live and sleep on the street. However, you have everything you need... And for free... This is not good, because it implies that people start

#### 4.1.2 Public Perception of Homelessness in Space

The aspect related to survival tactics is also interwoven the possible reception that these practices may have on housed individuals. In Chapter 3, I discussed Samuel Perry's work on urban hybrid spaces in relation to homelessness. According to Perry these types of space may grant homeless individuals a patron status. Through the adoption of good practices such as those named in this chapter as survival tactics, Perry asserts that individuals who are homeless may distance themselves from the characterisation of being homeless.<sup>124</sup>

Are these good practices, or survival tactics, as maintained by Perry, effectively emancipatory for the homeless individuals? Answering this question entails considering how homeless people are perceived by housed individuals. While the set of interviews to passers-by in both St Peter's Square and outside this context resulted not particularly fruitful to frame this particular aspect. In fact, the interviews unveiled an incapacity for establishing emancipatory forms of communication with individuals who are homeless. At best, the form of possible communication was in form of merciful donation. An interesting account emerged during a focus group held with a group of helpers at the Homeless Project run by the Sisters of Mercy in Edinburgh.<sup>125</sup> When I questioned the group about their perceptions of people who are homeless on the street, the group agreed with Ruggiero's (one of the participants in the focus group) claim:

relying only on the help coming from outside. I am not like them [the other homeless inhabitants], I do not forget I am homeless through alcohol... I am different and I do not want to live on the street for the rest of my life." The idea I could get from this interview is that the condition of being homeless is far more complex than imagined. I believe that the reason why most of the homeless people I interviewed refuse to use charitable services is not only due to lack of freedom. Perhaps it is more due to an overlapping of other reasons. I suspect one of the possible reasons is that within a homeless hostel, individuals face the condition of being homeless more, perceiving a loss of control over their lives. However, it is also possible to argue that while on the street, the condition of being homeless is obfuscated by the use of alcohol, which helps also against cold.

<sup>124</sup> Perry, "Urban Hybrid Space and the Homeless."

<sup>125</sup> I had one focus group with the some of the mebers of the group of helpers in March 2015. The group was formed by 5 people, Lucia, Ruggiero, Antonella, Simone and Pietro. They were all Italian, a condition that helped having a more relaxed conversation. The purpose of the focus group was to enquire them about their relationship to homelessness both in the context of the Convent and outside it. I was interested in understanding whether the fact they were helping at the Convent was affecting their perception of people who are homeless. Additionally, the focus group was also the occasion to investigate the possible reception of the project I was carrying out in St Peter's Square.

*Ruggiero: I notice the difference between seeing a same person in the Convent, when I am serving food and when he is on the street. I feel myself ineffectual! I don't know how to help!*

The interviewees reported to me how their way of relating to the people attending the service changed as they began serving at the Convent. In particular they maintain that sharing the space of the Convent in the circumstance of helping people in need brought to light affinities between them and homeless people who attended the service. In other words, it is possible to presume that actions, personal behaviours and attitudes carried out by homeless people during service were somehow acknowledged and recognised by these helpers. The same then may be said to happen on the side of people who are homeless towards the helpers. By contrast, public space seems not to offer the same type of productive environment.

Benedetto De Carolis connotes the aspect mentioned by Ruggiero during the focus group as a dissociative practice that is nonetheless felicitous.<sup>126</sup> De Carolis asserts that certain contexts, as in this specific case the Convent, inscribe a determinate set of rules within prescribed boundaries, i.e. the physical walls of the Convent. This provokes a dissociation from everyday reality which resembles the rules of a game played by kids.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, the dissociation is not meant to deny everyday reality. Rather, De Carolis sustains that the game rules over everyday reality, projecting what this has to offer into the game.<sup>128</sup> In fact, it is possible to maintain that in the specific context of the Convent, involved subjects are aware of the roles they play, i.e. helpers are there to serve meals and individuals who are homeless are there to be served. This happens within a space where everybody is aware that his/her behaviours must not harm the other.

By contrast, public space manufactures a short circuit. When the same subject who attends the service was encountered on the street, the helpers did not know what to do or how to help. This also included actions which were acknowledged

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<sup>126</sup> To be noted the reference that the Italian philosopher makes with Austin's Speech Act Theory. In effect, the theory at the base of De Carolis account is based on performativity. See De Carolis, *Il paradosso antropologico : nicchie, micromondi e dissociazione psichica*.

<sup>127</sup> De Carolis.

<sup>128</sup> De Carolis.

and recognised by the helpers in terms of personal behaviours, good practices and attitudes at the Convent. It is possible to assume that in this particular case, the type of projection mentioned above functions differently.

In this respect, as briefly discussed above in Chapter 2 concerning my personal approach to issues related to homelessness, Slavoj Žižek maintains (in a comparable context) that this type of short circuit is related to how desire and consequently ideology function. Desire is an elusive surplus: “it is nothing at all, just an empty surface, but because of it the break is nonetheless well worth the trouble.”<sup>129</sup> According to Žižek, everyday reality as such cannot really be formalised by a subject - reality does not have any form. Rather, in order to be formalised it requires to be observed through an interested eye. In the film *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*, which features Žižek himself, the reverse of this concept is brilliantly explained through the example offered by the film *They Live*. In this film the main character, after having found a strange box full of sunglasses, starts wearing one of them. As soon as he puts the sunglasses on, he starts seeing a radically different surrounding. As Žižek’s voice recounts, “the sunglasses functions as a critique to ideology in everyday reality,”<sup>130</sup> allowing the person who is wearing them to see the true message hidden beneath commercial posters on the street, e.g. instead of seeing a commercial reporting a “transparent computing environment” the character sees “obey”.<sup>131</sup>

By reversing this concept it is possible to claim that the presence of homeless people on the street (outside the context of the Convent) assumes a distinct form only if a subject, i.e. Ruggiero looks at it with an eye permeated by desire,<sup>132</sup> i.e. to help, in the attempt to propose again the same rules of the game as they were in the Convent. However, public space does not seem to offer such a support. In contrast, it does permit the subject to establish precise boundaries within which certain rules can be established. Hence, the possible solution put forward by my informants,<sup>133</sup> including the rest of the housed interviewees I met, concerned the

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129 Žižek, “Looking Awry an Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture.” p. 5

130 Sophie Fiennes, *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology*.

131 Sophie Fiennes.

132 Žižek, “Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture”.

133 I had another focus group with people who were not involved in any charitable service to investigate their relationship to homelessness. The focus group took place in February 2015

argument that homeless people would have been better off if not on the street. Finally, one interviewee highlighted a possible response to this aspect: an incapacity of overcoming certain boundaries set by cultural domains in public space:

*Marco P.: sometimes you think you want to offer your help, but then you see no one does and you think, well what can I do? Maybe someone else will come and help them.*

Confronted with the presence of a homeless person on the street this subject was thinking whether he could have done something to help. However, the fact that nobody else was offering any help to the homeless person was a condition that drove the interviewee to do nothing as well. The desire to help is on the one hand discouraged because nobody else helps and on the other hand it is substituted with a teleological sense of hope that at some point some person will help the homeless person.

#### **4.1.3 Making Space (Hostile) for the Homeless Person**

At this point one question seems to acquire relevance: do individuals who are homeless become vanished voices once on the street? This question is particularly relevant because on the one hand the previous section has highlighted how certain charitable activities may help construct forms of social inclusion between people who are homeless and people who are housed. Yet on the other hand, it also highlighted how charitable services, in this optic of inclusion and emancipation towards people who are homeless, may be regarded as controversial. More importantly, the question posed above acquires significance in light of the finding that the mechanisms manufactured within certain charitable contexts seem to disappear in public space. In this respect, a telling example of the challenges of providing support to people who are homeless is

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and involved 4 people Marco P., Marco D., Gabriele and Giovanni. During the focus group I could also investigate elements related to the project I was carrying out in St Peter's Square and whether this group of people could be interested in using the object.



offered by a protest action carried out in Nottingham across December 2015 and January 2016. Additionally this case study seems to represent a conjunction point between the two previous sections in that it highlights how people who are homeless may be considered as vanished voices while manifesting limitations akin to those accompanying the provision of charitable services.

In January 2016 I had the possibility of interviewing Hayden, the spokesman<sup>134</sup> of FightBack with regards to the protest action they were carrying out at that time. My initial question concerned the reason why they decided to start their protest. Hayden's reply was:

*It seems that when one becomes homeless also his voice is gone.*

Hayden in the interview reported how the initiative of occupying public spaces in Nottingham was agreed between the group of activists and the homeless people in the city. The activists were in fact already involved in providing support to homeless people through the so-called #OpSafeWinter (Operation Safe Winter). This is an operation run by *Anonymous* to provide homeless people with help in the form of donation of clothes, food, sleeping bags and tents or simply a familiar chat. Hayden reported how through encounters with homeless people they agreed that "something needed to be done" in order to raise awareness of the condition of rough sleepers in the city. The main aim of the protest was to highlight the condition of people sleeping rough in order to put pressure on Nottingham City Council to open empty buildings to host homeless people. This unveiled frictions and contrasts between the protesters and the City Council. Hence, Nottingham City Council claimed that in the city there were many charitable shelters available to people who are homeless to spend the night.<sup>135</sup> Additionally, it must further be taken into account how Nottingham City Council some months before the FightBack protest was put under pressure by a controversial campaign launched throughout the city. This

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<sup>134</sup> I have to report that one of the main difficulties approaching protest movements is concerned with a generalised diffidence that activists may have towards people approaching them. For instance, during the interview with Hayden he did not want to show his face nor to share the contacts of other activists of FightBack. Additionally, his name could be fictional. I tried to contact other people that took part in the protest action, but the endeavour was unfruitful.

<sup>135</sup> Ireland, "We Will Play Cat and Mouse with the Council until They Open Empty Buildings."

consisted of “don't give cash to beggars” posters on bins and bus stops.<sup>136</sup> The protest action, which consisted in the occupation of presumably public ground<sup>137</sup>, ended with the protesters (including the group of 26 homeless individuals) being evicted. However, a number of rough sleepers involved managed to be housed.

## #OpSafeWinter

Greetings citizens of the world, we are  
Anonymous.

Mission of the operation: to highlight the  
homeless situation in cities across the  
globe.

Step 1: List cities in alphabetical order  
with homeless count.

Step 2: Establish a resource network and  
food supply to be distributed across the  
streets.



Every year homeless people die from  
freezing and inadequate access to  
shelter, an entirely preventable  
situation.

Expect us.

Illustration 17: #OpSafeWinter Flyer.  
Courtesy image Anonymous

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<sup>136</sup> Tom Norton, “City Council under Fire over ‘Hateful’ and ‘Disgusting’ Anti-Begging Campaign.” This type of campaigns can be regarded as a form of anti-homeless architecture as those mentioned in the previous Chapter through the account by James Petty.

<sup>137</sup> According to Hayden the occupied ground was meant to be public but during the occupation was sold to a private college.



Illustration 18: #GiveSmartCampaign. Image courtesy NottinghamPost

In light of this background context it is possible to analyse the FightBack protest action through the account provided by Serres and related commentaries on parasitism and mediation. The parasite is intended by Serres as a relation to a relation. Stephen Crocker, commenting on Serres' concept, writes that "[t]he parasite finds its way into the relation between sender and receiver, or guest and host. And once inside that relation, it compels the communication circuit as a whole to adjust to its presence."<sup>138</sup> However, it is also possible to argue that the concept of parasitism is not static. Rather, roles within the communication circuit as described by Crocker can constantly change. Additionally, it is important to underline what Crocker suggests apropos Serres' concept of the master/slave dialectic, which drafts the hypothesis around which the analysis on FightBack's occupation should be regarded critically. As he writes:

*[t]he master–slave dialectic describes how a subject becomes an object, or vice versa. The parasite, however, is in the place of neither the subject nor the object. It is a device, an operator, by means of which one is able to turn into the other. It has a relation to the relation between subjects and objects.*<sup>139</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Crocker, "Noises and Exceptions: Pure Mediality in Serres and Agamben." p. 9

<sup>139</sup> Crocker. p. 11

In this respect this aspect calls back into question what was described in the final sections of Chapter 3 concerning the practices of people who are homeless. There it was reported how these change throughout the data, adapting themselves to different socio-spatial conditions and contexts.

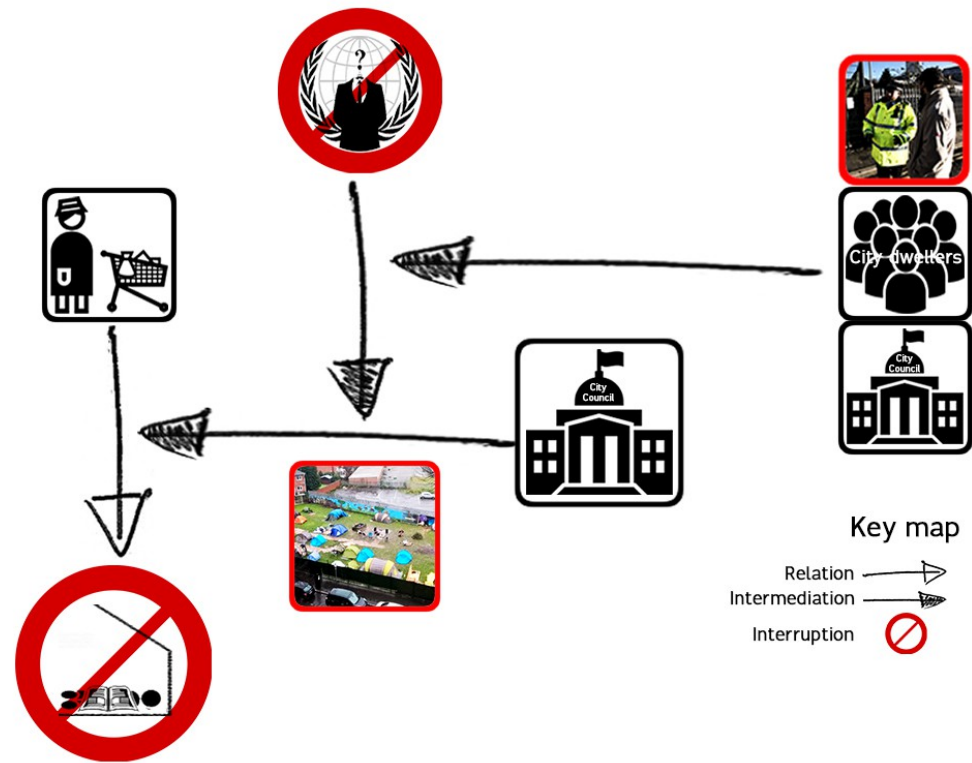


Illustration 19: Diagram showing the parasitic cascade

At this point, it is possible to say that, as represented by the diagram above, there exists a relation between people who are homeless, and public space.<sup>140</sup> This relation is subjected to interference by Nottingham City Council's political tools, i.e. anti-beggar campaigns and policies concerning unused buildings. This interference between people who are homeless and public space is an intermediary position as it is aimed at interrupting that existing relation.<sup>141</sup> However it is also possible to note how this intermediation then determines a

<sup>140</sup> Actually the diagram should have started by showing the relation between housed individuals and public space, which is modified by the interference of people who are homeless inhabiting public space.

<sup>141</sup> Brown, "Serres and Mediation."

parasitic cascade. In other words, the lack of political tools in support of people who are homeless in Nottingham determines the reaction by FightBack. This installs itself between the previous relation, the one that interrupted individuals who are homeless and public space. The peak and ending point is reached when the protesters are evicted by Nottingham City Council (after complaints from city dwellers).<sup>142</sup> As reported by Hayden, this was also due to the fact the public ground they were occupying was sold to a private college.<sup>143</sup>

Within these intermediate passages, the role and autonomy of the homeless individuals involved change progressively. In other words, the capability mentioned before of acting as “a parasite”, an individual who is actively able to adapt his/her behaviours to satisfy different needs and depending from different socio-spatial contexts gets progressively lost. It is possible to argue that the group of individuals who are homeless that were involved in the protest were relying on a service provided by another group of individuals, i.e. Fightback. Additionally, this example seems to maintain the hypothesis suggested by Hayden only through Fightback's intervention homeless people may claim their presence. Finally, it is also possible to assert that the message behind the protest action carried out by FightBack underlies the delicacy of topics and hypothesis around the role of individuals who are homeless and the challenge in support to issues inherent in homelessness.

#### 4.1.4 Summary

The case studies analysed in this chapter have outlined a series of findings concerning individuals who are homeless; inhabitation of public space; and social inclusion. In particular, the chapter invites the reader to reflect on whether the various activities carried out in support of people who are homeless effectively achieve the manufacture of processes of inclusion. This thesis questions particularly this point, claiming that to design more inclusive public spaces

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142 Lucy Budge, “Nottingham Homeless Protest: Residents Take Action to Reclaim Community Garden.”

143 Unfortunately, I could not find any finding to support Hayden's claim. However, it is interesting to note the relationship between private and public in relation to consumerism as developed in the previous chapter.

implies a rethinking of aspects such as mediation, familiarisation of the other and public space itself. The construction of more inclusive public spaces necessitates that each contribution, practice and behaviour is acknowledged and recognised. The next three chapters will focus on clarifying these aspects, which were then utilised to inform the design of the object presented in Chapter 8.



## 5 The Backdoors of Public Space



The purpose of this chapter is to re-elaborate the arguments developed in the previous two chapters, functioning as an intermediate chapter that connects the conclusions from those chapters with the intended focus of the chapters that follow.

In particular, Chapter 3 was focused on public space. It aimed to outline how an understanding of inclusiveness and the question inherent in how public space is conceived, perceived and utilised in everyday life should require the adoption of a wider set of analyses. Hence these cannot be focused solely on the description of urban practices that, although they turn public space into a multifunctional type of space,<sup>144</sup> are nevertheless diminished and excluded in favour of practices that are more related to consumerism. What emerged from Chapter 3 was that, by focusing the analytical gaze also on those social actors who are not homeless, a very different and yet equally legitimate set of arguments can be developed.

Chapter 4 analysed the research question related to the presence of people who are homeless on the street. One of its key arguments was developed by looking at homelessness through the point of view of its perception by others on the street. As was described in that chapter, perception and the consequent possibility of opening individuals to encounters with an unknown other, i.e. be they both an individual who faces homelessness and a housed one, change according to the context. The most salient aspect that Chapter 4 highlighted was to show how this can operate, through the analysis of the charitable helpers' experience. My informants reported how inside St Mary's Convent in Edinburgh, where the charitable project takes place, helpers, by operating a projection of reality into a form of game (and here I drew upon the work of De Carolis in conceiving of this as a game/reality relationship), are open to having encounters with individuals who face homelessness. By contrast, the situation when a homeless person is met on the street changes fundamentally. In this circumstance, the process of projection involves desire. As described in Chapter 4, desire is nothing else than the projection of one's own personal insight towards another

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144 Doron, "The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression."

individual, i.e. a homeless person on the street, who can be regarded as an empty and passive subject.

The scenario that emerges from the question concerning what inclusive public space means and implies can be then summarised by the following statement: the question related to inclusion or exclusion of certain urban practices, i.e. inhabitation of public space, is determined by (and perhaps it is also strictly dependent upon) the relationship between private and public spheres in conjunction with another set of factors - the relationship between transgression and profanation. The first two factors were discussed and analysed in the previous chapters. The second set of factors will be analysed in detail in the following chapters 6 and 7. However, in this chapter it will be shown that it is possible to anticipate that the dovetailing of private and public sphere in relation to transgression and profanation produces a condition in which the array of practices that take place in public space are subjected to forms of antagonism. In other words, they remain alternative one with another. In this sense, it is possible to understand why the range of analyses that were carried out in Chapter 3 included diverging and in some respects contradictory sources and points of view.

How to show what is argued in the statement above? Additionally, how to turn the theoretical scaffolding developed throughout these initial chapters into an architectural discourse concerning inclusivity and public space? The hypothesis is that a possible explanation can be made by giving a new interpretation of public space and the mechanisms that are present in it. In this respect, the chapter will introduce a metaphorical image to describe public space - this functions according to the presence of backdoors, the tools deployed in informatics to grant multiple access to a system by different users. This is developed through the use of two speculative case studies: two entries for architectural ideas competitions that formed part of the experimentations carried out during the development of this doctoral thesis. The first deals specifically with the notion of backdoor, attempting to translate it into an architectural project. The second example explores notions of inclusivity, by reworking the concept of event developed by French philosopher Alain Badiou.

## 5.1 Private/Public Spheres and Transgression/Profanation in Public Space

Before describing how public space functions according to the presence of backdoors, it seems useful to address the two aspects introduced above, private and public spheres in relation to transgression and profanation. To maintain that the exclusion of certain practices from everyday public life is related to the relationship between private and public sphere invokes two concepts that were already encountered: tolerance and scarcity. It is possible to argue that certain practices belong to the private sphere. Therefore, in order not to impose on other individuals, these practices cannot be carried out publicly, e.g. eating or sleeping during day time by people who are homeless. As discussed in Chapter 3, these practices can be carried out solely in remote areas or when places are temporarily urban voids. This highlights how the mechanisms behind public space's functioning can be framed within logics akin to scarcity.

According to Jeremy Till et al., scarcity implies that public space can be assimilated to an interior room, showing how on the one hand the private (dominant) sphere determines which behaviours and practices are allowed to be carried out publicly. On the other hand, this thesis agrees with Till et al. in that by assimilating public space to an interior room, this shows how this functions effectively as a corridor with doors. Hence doors may grant access to public space only to certain social actors who belong to specific sociocultural domains. In other words, the access is granted only to those practices that are regarded as legitimate.<sup>145</sup> However, the findings of this thesis suggest that this view is also a simplification of the way public space effectively functions. In other words, to assume public space as an indoor space composed of doors and corridors is not sufficient to explain the whole array of practices, survival tactics and behaviours that take place in everyday public life.

In a scenario where scarcity is one of the main constituents, a possible way towards the definition of more inclusive public spaces, as described in Chapter 2, may be the idea of accident. This manufactures a condition in which all the social actors involved are commonly exposed to precarity. Precarity then functions as a

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<sup>145</sup> Jon Goodbun et al., *The Design of Scarcity*.

common ground of equality in which people are more willing to deploy forms of mutual help and reciprocal obligation, disregarding sociocultural differences.<sup>146</sup> However, if this condition of precarity grants some room for inclusivity in public space, the condition, which I encountered more often during this investigation, is the one where most of the urban practices that are carried out in public space remain alternative one with another.

In the book *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*, Awan, Schneider, and Till argue that the meaning of alternative implies the presence of two distinct poles in which the centre remains substantially untroubled.<sup>147</sup> Most importantly, the meaning of alternative entails the fact that the two poles, although they tend to replicate one with the other, also tend to exclude themselves reciprocally. By framing this aspect within the analysis carried out in the research for this thesis, I agree with what Awan, Schneider, and Till maintain, which concerns the inhabitation of the portico area in St Peter's Square by individuals who are homeless: despite the community of homeless individuals cleaning up the space of the portico every morning, faking their presence under an apparent mundanity, their social status of people who are homeless keeps remaining fundamentally the same. Additionally, their good practices and behaviours, their so called survival tactics, do not grant any right of permanence underneath the portico. Hence, they can be moved away at any time, i.e. on the occasion when a press conference had to be held in the building underneath the portico, which caused the removal of all the homeless individuals from this space.

However, what was argued by Awan, Schneider, and Till is also verified when the argument involves examples related to public interventions that aim to produce ameliorative conditions for people who are homeless. In these cases, as discussed in Chapter 3 with the example of FightBack, the intervention made by the protest group remained alternative to the institutional system constituted by Nottingham City Council, and even became perceived as intolerable that they were evicted.

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<sup>146</sup> Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*.

<sup>147</sup> Awan, Schneider, and Till, *Spatial Agency : Other Ways of Doing Architecture* / Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, Jeremy Till.

In this respect it is possible to see how the aspect related to private/public spheres is deeply linked with transgression/profanation. In other words, certain practices and behaviours are tolerated up to a certain point. Overcoming the limitations set by tolerance implies that the practice must be removed from public view, which demonstrates a peculiar characteristic of both tolerance and transgression: they both function as an elastic. It may get larger and include practices that were not previously included, but it can also reach a breaking point in which the practice becomes profanatory, that is, intolerable.<sup>148</sup>

## 5.2 The Backdoors of Public Space

At this point, it is possible to give a different interpretation of public space: one that may be able to show what was postulated in the introduction to this chapter and eventually open this to new scenarios within the realm of architectural interventions that may nourish conditions of inclusivity in architectural spaces. The following sections will describe two speculative projects that were carried out during the preparation of this doctoral thesis. The aim of these two experimentations was to make explicit the fact that, although I agree with what was argued by Till et al. in *The Design of Scarcity* – that public space can be assimilated to an indoor space - I also maintain that this view is rather simplistic. In other words, it does not take into account the range of secondary and hidden entrances and accesses to public life that are at stake. Despite the metaphorical image of doors granting a degree of control over the access to public space of certain, customary, practices, it does not entail the fact that incursions may occur from secondary entrances.

Hence, the aim of the two examples that will be presented in this section was, since their very conception, to make explicit the following conditions: in one case, the intention was to show how the condition of use of a single urban space changes throughout the day. The project challenges the idea of inclusion of certain practices over others in that to allow the presence of heterogeneous practices in architectural space implies the definition of more responsive architectural types of construction. In the second case, the example challenges the

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<sup>148</sup> This particular aspect will be analysed in the next chapter 6.

idea of inclusion itself. In particular, the idea that inclusion into public life can be somehow universalised is rather dangerous and its result may be unproductive. I maintain that inclusion should be a collective process that involves institutions as much as city-dwellers.

The main argument that sustains my idea that public space is composed of backdoors is that architectural space is a type of performative space. This particular aspect was discussed and researched with the contribution of scholar and renowned architect Bernard Tschumi both during an encounter/interview I personally had with him in 2014 and through a short series of emails we continued to have after our meeting. In particular while discussing my thesis with Tschumi, I also developed a series of images that recalled his famous *advertisements for architecture*.<sup>149</sup> Mine were titled (h)acknowledgements for architecture and one of these dealt with performativity.

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149 Advertisements for Architecture were a series of images elaborated by Tschumi. They were aimed to question architectural concepts through the use of evocative images. The main purpose was also to make these images evocative and comprehended by a large part of the public. See Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction / Bernard Tschumi*; Tschumi, *Architecture Concepts : Red Is Not a Color / Bernard Tschumi*.

(h)acknowledgements for architecture

Performativity is what makes architecture lie in the paradoxical condition of being coercive– you must use me in this way, and being transgressed– you can also use me in this other way.



Architecture has always been very much about a *dis*course of narratives as much as it should now be a narrative of *dis*courses

Illustration 20: (H)Acknowledgement for Architecture #1

The writing on the image stated: “performativity is what makes architecture lie in the paradoxical condition of being both coercive – you must use me in this way – and being transgressed – you can also use me in this other way. Architecture has always been very much about a discourse of narratives as much as it should now be a narrative of discourses.” The image reflected upon the notion of narrative and interpretation of architectural space, playing with the word “discourse”. The image aimed to criticise the idea of discourse of narrative: the process of reasoning about connected events in space – understanding the possible ways in which the same space can be used by people according to a process of interpretation. The same process is then transferred to people who face homelessness who are encountered/excluded in space. In other words, the aim is

to outline how the etymology of the word discourse is “to run a part”,<sup>150</sup> in order to propose a narrative of discourses instead: the process of connecting events that run apart. In this respect the image also invites the viewer to reflect on the aspect related to alternative practices and exclusion, which will be explored in the second example presented. As noted above, within alternative poles the centre ground between them remains substantially untroubled by one of the two poles that is eventually excluded.

### 5.2.1 The Project for an Urban Backdoor

This project came about as a theoretical reflection which, through adaptive architecture and the use of a kinetic element, explores the inversion of roles in the relationship between building users and architectural spaces. The Parioli municipality in Rome asked designers for redevelopment ideas for an area between a train station, which links the north side of Rome with the north side of the Lazio region, and an ancient water source, probably attributable to Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The theme on which designers were invited to reflect was that of the urban doorways. I designed it during my first year, while researching Pussy Riot's occupation and notions of mediation.<sup>151</sup>

The project involved two different issues: a functional aspect referred to the train station and a cultural one referred to the ancient water source as a historical trace, a memory of the place. These two instances framed the project into a

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150 From the Online Etymology Dictionary, the word discourse is defined as the "process of understanding, reasoning, thought," from French discours, from Latin discursus "a running about," in Late Latin "conversation," from past participle stem of discurre "run about," from dis- "apart" (see dis-) + currere "to run" (see current (adj.)). Sense of "formal speech or writing" is first recorded 1580s. Therefore in my entry I played with the prefix dis- "apart" and currere- "to run" in order to find a possible new interpretation of the word discourse.

151 As reported in Chapter 2, at that time I was not yet concerned with concepts such as homelessness and public space or exclusion and inclusion. However, in the process of writing up this thesis it seems useful to remark how the theme of urban doors is often linked to train stations as the spaces through which people have direct access to cities. However, these spaces are often congregational areas for homeless people as well, e.g. Rome's main station, Termini, is used as a sheltered area overnight by hundreds of rough sleepers. However, as reported in Chapter 1 these spaces change completely from day to night. Therefore the image of people sleeping rough in Termini Station cannot be grasped by tourists and the general public on their arrive in Rome. This short reasoning should invigorate the emphasis put above and in Chapter 3 that certain different uses of space are not deemed as diversities but rather as something to be subtracted from public view.



tension between binary poles: which of the two had to prevail? Was the project mainly a train station, surrounded by the addition of areas reserved to local inhabitants for public activities? Or vice versa, did the cultural instance have to prevail over the train station, perhaps through the definition of a mixed typology edifice that could host a variety of functions? And within these questions, what were the exigencies and roles that users – both train station users and local inhabitants – had? As discussed above, binary poles may end up being opposite to one another while carrying out the same activities. The danger is that eventually one pole may prevail or exclude the other.

Specifically, this reasoning can also be conveyed with the idea of doors as explained above. Metaphorically, doors, by granting access to a determinate environment, can be said to represent the making explicit of identities. They unveil the nature of the environment while determining the identity of the activity that will be carried out inside, which will also affect users. This may be proportional to the grandeur of the entrance. Doors in this respect are metaphorical signals that define the identity of a space by marking a threshold. Once they have passed through doors, individuals are subjected to the rules of that space. However, on the threshold, identities remain undefined. As described in Chapter 3, certain practices keep haunting public space. They remain on the threshold, looking for possible alternative secondary entrances.

The idea behind the development of an urban backdoor was aimed to make this condition explicit rather than simply celebrating it as the possible presence of an array of practices. Hence, backdoors are holes in the system deliberately left in place to allow multiple access. In other words, the incursions described above, through backdoors, are made explicit and somehow legitimised.

### **5.2.2 Designing the Backdoor**

The presence of a threshold was recreated by replacing the old train station building with a new one, which faces a second twin building. These define a square area onto which the backdoor can be installed. The development of this was achieved through the construction and instruction of an algorithm. This

turns the square area into a four-piece kinetic element that moves up or down, accommodating the binary instance of being functional for train station users and at the same time a space for possible collective aggregation.



Illustration 21: Schematic view from Grasshopper. Four-piece square functional-instance modality on the left and cultural-instance on the right

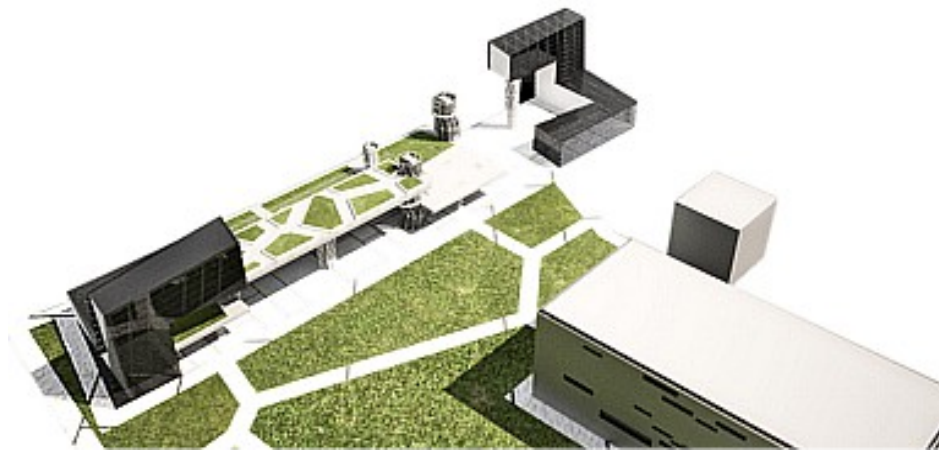


Illustration 22: Axonometric view on the project site



Illustration 23: Perspective view. On the left the new train station and on the right the mixed-use building



Illustration 24: Perspective view of the ancient water source and the new urban park

During the opening hours of the train station when passenger flow is high, a two-piece portion of the square (the functional instance) moves upwards while the other two-piece portion remains on the ground. This portion becomes a covered and welcoming space for train station users who arrive and leave daily. When the train station has a low passenger flow, the previous portion moves down to the ground to become a public square while the other two-piece portion (the cultural instance) moves upwards. The backdoor is completed by the use of movable panels placed on the ground. The panels are meant to be multi-functional partitions that can be used as informative or art exhibition panels, as walls for stands in a local market, for video or movie projections and so on. The aim is to realise a space that is neither open nor closed; neither inside nor outside; neither public nor private; but rather an adaptive space that embeds all these aspects.

However, in the published article that followed this project<sup>152</sup> the recommendation for making this type of project achievable was to rethink the way of managing such spaces. This should involve public institutions and private bodies calling directly into question the collective of potential users while setting

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152 Gesuelli and Andreotti, "The Urban Backdoor: Replacing the Meaning of Mediator in Architectural Public Space."

daily or weekly programmes of activities. These can be put into a booking system so that people can book the space and use it accordingly. The idea I attempted to pursue was that the urban backdoor could not function without the direct activation of its users, organising and constructing that space, which I believe could have functioned. Additionally, this idea of architectural space may also have promoted aspects such as collaboration, inclusion and reciprocal respect among strangers using the space. By contrast (and perhaps this can be considered a failure), it is also possible to argue that the proposed regulatory framework may also be counterproductive. In other words, the project fails to question whether access to individuals who may be regarded as not welcomed, e.g. rough sleepers may have been granted.

### 5.3 The Project for Jesi's *Dépistage*

The second project investigates the other aspect related to alternative practice: exclusion and the consequent demand for inclusion. It was part of a competition launched by the municipality of Jesi, a small yet artistic town in the north-west of Italy. The brief required designers to rethink touristic itineraries for the city to include monuments that had been forgotten and excluded from touristic routes. The city of Jesi was characterised by a series of buildings that were effectively regarded as monuments, i.e. both described as such in touristic guides and officially presented as monuments in the city council's website. By contrast, there were a vast number of other important buildings and spaces that were excluded from tourists' itineraries.

While preparing the paper for a conference at the University of Warwick that reflected on the notion of events in architecture,<sup>153</sup> I came across French philosopher Badiou's notion of an event.<sup>154</sup> This seemed to be particularly relevant to the theme of exclusion/inclusion. In particular Badiou focuses his theory on the meaning of belonging and inclusion. Borrowing elements from mathematical set operations, Badiou asserts that within sets, which can be

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153 The conference was titled APT 2014 Power in a World of Becoming, Entanglement & Attachment and held at the University of Warwick on 2-3 June 2014. My paper was titled "The House of Cards and the Square: A missed promise?" It attempted to provide a critical reflection on the notion of event and its use in architecture. See the Annexes.

154 See Badiou, *Being and Event*.

compared to more complex systems such as the city of Jesi, there can occur three types of situations: the normal situation, where something or somebody both belongs to and is included within the system, i.e. the monuments in Jesi are both recognised and counted as such (presented in touristic guides and websites). The second condition identified by Badiou, *singularity*, happens when something belongs to a system without being included, i.e. the monuments that are excluded from tourist itineraries yet belong to the city of Jesi. The event, for Badiou, occurs when the singularity is turned into normality: what was previously excluded is now included within the system. There is a third component then in Badiou's notion of an event: the excrescence. This component describes a condition in which something or somebody is included in a system but does not belong to it. Badiou's commentator Brent Adkins, in order to explain this third component, uses the example of the spy. The spy usually works for a government – the spy is included in the system. However, it keeps its fidelity secret in order to steal information from other countries – it does not belong to any system. In other words, its identity is not defined and is susceptible to changes.<sup>155</sup>

Hence, Jesi's competition presented all the features needed to test whether Badiou's excrescence could be applied to an architectural project. In the competition about itineraries, Badiou's notion was linked with the French word *dépistage*. In particular the word has a double meaning: it can be understood either as leading one off track – that is giving false information to somebody – or as screening, i.e. as preventive medical screening aimed to discover diseases. In other words, while the word recalled the activity of a spy, entailing both covering and uncovering traces, it also offered the grounds to experiment with the idea of a system in which identities are changeable and not defined.

The first step was to illustrate the situation of architecture in Jesi. If architecture were provided with the capability of speaking, institutional monuments, e.g. the Duomo of Jesi, would have stated: “I am a monument!”, whereas excluded monuments would have been expressing their demands to be noticed and included. In this respect, I played with double meanings, e.g. the

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155 Adkins, “Deleuze and Badiou on the Nature of Events”.

stone that marks the highest point of the city declared to the tourist its passion for bondage, i.e. it liked to be stepped on/ dominated by people in order to attract their attention. Another forgotten building was promoting its right to be recognised as a monument, motivating the claim by virtue of its similarity with another building that was officially regarded as a monument. In this respect, by making explicit the instances of the excluded monuments in Jesi, this seemed to be a way to critically reflect on the use of persuasive tactics of survival and the use of rhetoric presented in this and the third chapter: they aim performatively to overcome precarity and claim an existence of their own.

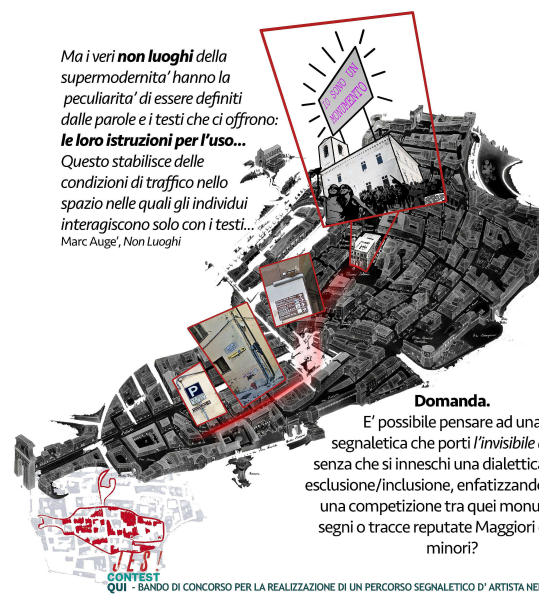


Illustration 25: Institutional monuments

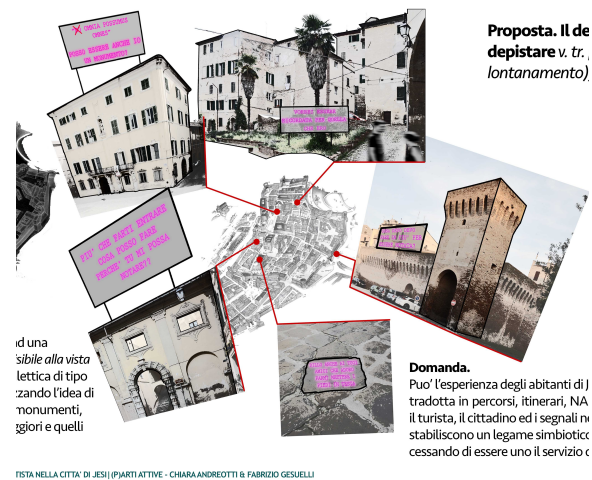


Illustration 26: Excluded monuments in Jesi

The proposal then involved a twofold aspect: one, it proposed to remove all the touristic signs in the city and to replace them with QR code. This operation was meant to hide buildings' identity. They would still belong to Jesi, without being included in Jesi. Furthermore, the use of QR codes would prevent tourists from getting directions and establishing, in this way, predetermined touristic routes into the city.<sup>156</sup> This operation was to be completed by the second aspect: the development of a geo-localised application for smartphones. It worked through Jesi's public Wi-Fi system by scanning the QR codes, which were disseminated throughout the city. Each QR code corresponded to an itinerary, which was designed by Jesi's citizens according to their memories and stories of the places in which they lived. In this respect, itineraries designed by Jesi's dwellers could include all sorts of spaces and buildings throughout the city. The routes could also involve parts of the city that were not initially included. Additionally, once the QR code is scanned, no itinerary would appear on the smartphone. The only writing that tourists see would be: "Start walking". When the tourists approached one of the itinerary's points, the mobile phone would start vibrating, signalling and describing the story of that point.

<sup>156</sup> This aspect was directly based on the work by anthropologist Marc Augé and the influence of road signals on people. See Augé, *Non-Places*.

The inclusion of excluded monuments was to come as the result of a precarious condition. This was performed by hiding information, which was revealed only when the tourist was in the proximity of one of the points. The system could also be made to include routes added? from the tourists' experience. In this respect, the claim for universalisation inherent in the process of inclusion was reversed. Rather than thinking that the excluded buildings were also monuments, the proposal reversed this condition: in Jesi, every building and space could be regarded as a monument. Hence, monuments were defined not by institutionalised processes but by Jesi's citizens (both temporary and permanent residents) and their stories, memories and collective values.

### 5.3.1 Inclusion of the Excluded in Public Space

While at a first glance, the insight from this project can be applied to the situation concerning homeless people's exclusion (and also with the example described in the previous chapter regarding Nottingham activists), on closer inspection the solution to the problem at stake may not be as easy as it seems to be on the surface. In fact, by taking back Badiou's notion of event, it is possible to say that the normal situation is characterised by individuals forming the general public who are granted access to public spaces. These people can lie down and have a rest on city benches or public gardens. They can occupy spaces without being regarded as a threat. Then there is the condition of those who are excluded. These people, i.e. the homeless people, who are regarded as intrusive, have to deploy a series of survival tactics in order to claim their right to stay, as presented in Chapter 3. They are merely tolerated, and may be moved away from the place they occupy at any time and circumstance. Or worse their presence is denied from city centres by repressive policies and anti-homeless architecture. And once their claim for inclusion is performed through the action of the activists, both are excluded just as much. Finally, when the recognition and inclusion of the excluded is institutionalised, as I reported while presenting a paper for the conference *Housed by Choice/Housed by Force- Homes, conflicts and conflicting interests*,<sup>157</sup> it may emphasise social contrast. This dealt with the case of an

<sup>157</sup> The conference was organised by the journal Architecture MPS, University of Cyprus and Cyprus institute. My paper was titled *Forced to live dead in Public Space: An experiment of democracy in Rome*.



abandoned elementary school transformed into a hostel for homeless people in Rome, where public reaction is to complain about public money being spent. The complaint is that it could be spent on providing taxpayers' children's schools with services that are indeed lacking.<sup>158</sup>



Illustration 27: Picture of the article published on a Roman newspaper with comments from citizens complaining about the project

It is also possible to argue that the notion of excrescence introduced by Badiou may describe the condition at stake with people who are homeless. Hence, within the remit of homeless people, the excrescence's double identity can be described by the survival tactics described in the third chapter. These aim to render the space of the portico area in St Peter's Square normalised, preventing the public from seeing its second hidden face, that of a temporary dormitory for homeless people overnight. The obvious consideration is to see how spaces and actions are truly interconnected and manifest multiple identities according to the actions people carry out within them. However, the two identities of the portico are somehow kept hidden. They are made explicit once during the day and once at night, to gradually fade into each other as the day goes by. Therefore the homeless person can be regarded as carrying out the same activity as Adkins-Badiou's spy seems to describe.

158 One of the comment from the picture above says: "in my daughters' school, walls are dirty and falling into decay. Floors are dangerous and with missing tiles substituted by cardboard. Parents provide for toilette paper as much as we also bought the blackboard and we are going to pay for the music class, although this is a compulsory course. And I pay a hell of taxes! Is it normal?"

The architectural questions are therefore how to perform a process of inclusion that does not provoke any other consequent exclusion; and how to perform a process of inclusion that is not regarded as exclusive and imposed from a superstructure. Can the notion of excrescence then possibly be applied in order to perform a different condition of inclusion of the excluded? These questions will find a fuller answer in Chapter 8 and 9. However, it is possible to conclude that the idea of applying concepts related to the idea of excrescence seems to be promising in order to promote new and more shared conditions of inclusivity in public space.

## 5.4 Summary

With regards to the arguments discussed in this chapter, it is possible to conclude that within the remit of architectural studies, the idea maintained by Jeremy Till et al. that public space is composed by doors and corridors is relatively simplistic. This thesis fundamentally agrees with their argument in that it offers a clear view of the possible mechanisms at stake in public space. However, to intend public space as an interior space implies the presence of a form of control over the range of practices and their accessibility that, according to my analysis, is constantly transgressed. From this recognition of control it is possible to understand the reason why I maintain a description of public space as being composed by backdoors. Additionally, this aspect can also be extended to a consideration concerning possible architectural interventions that aim to manufacture the construction of more inclusive public spaces. By understanding public space as composed by backdoors this implies the adoption of an array of different tools with which it is possible to analyse everyday public life. In other words, I argue that what seems to be missing from the range of sources analysed so far is a concrete attempt to manufacture an awareness of the presence of a gap between alternative practices. In this scenario, the risk inherent in any possible architectural intervention is to increase this gap, by exacerbating the relationship between two oppositional stances. This explains why the two examples presented in this chapter attempted to overcome the presence of binary conditions, favouring a different form of engagement.

Finally, from the analysis carried out so far, it emerges the necessity of elaborating further two aspects. One, profanation: this involves the study of the mechanisms that determine exclusion and will be illustrated in the next Chapter 6. Two, the process of familiarisation with an unfamiliar other, which will be described in Chapter 7.



## 6 Profanation and Exclusion in Public Space: The Case of Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer*

The previous chapter focused on the necessity of analysing in greater depth two elements that represent core concepts for the development of this doctoral thesis and in questions of inclusivity and public space. One of these two elements refers to the mechanisms of exclusion of certain practices from public space. As developed through the account provided by Doron in chapter 3, the argument is that certain practices, although they contribute to making public space more heterogeneous, can be carried out publicly only under the condition that this is temporarily an urban void. Alternatively, these practices are forced to be carried out in remote and hidden areas.

The purpose of this chapter is to shed light on the reasons that stand behind the mechanisms of exclusion of urban practices from public life. To begin with, the chapter will set out a discussion of an external case study: Russian punk band Pussy Riot's performance in Moscow in 2012 and its architectural and religious context. In other words I will make a digression into a case study, which on the surface, shares little with homelessness and inclusivity. However, as the chapter proceeds the link with homelessness, inclusivity and public space will appear more clear.

Hence, Pussy Riot's case study is emblematic in describing how certain practices become an act of profanation of space that is so intolerable it has to be moved away. It shows how the use of rhetorical language aimed to add legitimacy to the protest action. However, if on the one hand legitimacy is necessary to convey a message that can be supported by other individuals, on the other hand it seems to be counter-productive. The use of rhetorical language framed the performance as profanatory. An analysis of the literature, and particularly of the account provided by Nicholas Denysenko, a scholar of Byzantine and Orthodox liturgy, and Sergei Prozorov, suggests that *Punk Prayer* attempts to be a legitimate prayer. Two factors concur with this assertion: the venue in which the performance was staged – the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour; and a combination of symbolic gestures and language, which belong to Orthodox piety. The artistic collective Metahaven, in the analysis of the relationship between jokes and protest actions, argues that the combination of physical occupation of space and communication provokes a type of disruption

that marks the difference between spectacle and antagonism. In this respect, this type of disruption will be linked with the argument about profanation to reveal how certain practices remain alternative. In conclusion, it is possible to regard this chapter as a completion of Doron's analysis of transgressive and alternative practices. This thesis suggests that by acknowledging the mechanisms of exclusion of certain practices over the others, then it is possible to add nuances and new theoretical insights to the argument concerning inclusion and public space. In the concluding section of the chapter, the analysis will highlight the necessity of looking at precarity. This thesis aims to highlight that it is through an extension of the concept of precarity into public space that it is possible to conceive architectural interventions that may attempt to answer the following research questions: How can design problematise the centre between alternative practices in order to favour the formation of more inclusive spaces? By intending the centre as precarious, is it through an understatement of precarity that it is possible to find a way of problematising this centre?

## 6.1 Pussy Riot's Punk Prayer

On the morning of 21 February 2012 five members of Russian punk collective Pussy Riot occupied the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour to perform *Punk Prayer*. Wearing bright clothes and balaclavas to cover their faces, the five performers made strong statements against Russian president Vladimir Putin, appealing to the Virgin Mary to put him away. The performance also expressed grievances against Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kyrill. The performance lasted something like 40 seconds before Pussy Riot's members were taken away by security agents. Three days after the performance was staged Pussy Riot released a video of the performance on YouTube. This is a post-produced two-minute video with a more elaborate soundtrack that mixes the recordings at Christ the Saviour with other minor venues in which *Punk Prayer* was rehearsed. A few weeks later, three members of Pussy Riot were arrested and a trial commenced while all the five members were charged with the accusation of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred.<sup>159</sup>

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159 Bernstein, "An Inadvertent Sacrifice: Body Politics and Sovereign Power in the Pussy Riot Affair".



Illustration 28: Pussy Riot performing Punk Prayer. Source The Guardian

The trial's reception was mixed. Anthropologist and scholar in Russian studies and religion Anya Bernstein reports that while most of the Euro-American coverage "seemed bewildered by what appeared as a disproportionate reaction of the Russian state to this affair, the local public response was at best mixed."<sup>160</sup> Despite the performance manifesting grievances against President in charge Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Kyrill, it found most of Putin's political opponents united in condemning Pussy Riot.<sup>161</sup> In a political context marked by the protest that occurred in December 2011 against Putin's new election,<sup>162</sup> as reported by *Punk Prayer's* commentator Nicholas Denysenko, the reason for this political unity must be sought in the religious content of the performance and the trial.<sup>163</sup> As asserted by Bernstein, "the case became notorious as the first post-Soviet 'blasphemy trial,' a stunning reversal of course in a country where militant blasphemy against religion was something that was close to official ideology for most of the twentieth century."<sup>164</sup> Political analyst and scholar Sergei Prozorov

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. p. 221

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Denysenko, "An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot's Punk Performance in Moscow".

<sup>163</sup> Prozorov, "Pussy Riot and the Politics of Profanation: Parody, Performativity, Veridiction".

<sup>164</sup> Bernstein, "An Inadvertent Sacrifice: Body Politics and Sovereign Power in the Pussy Riot



supports this thesis, suggesting that *Punk Prayer* blurred the dividing line between what was regarded as the sacred and the profane in Russian Orthodox liturgy.<sup>165</sup> His analysis suggests that the use of prayer was regarded as a serious form of parody and turned *Punk Prayer* into an improper and blasphemous use of prayer.<sup>166</sup> Therefore, the performance was intended as a profanation of the use of prayer and consequently as a profanation of the sacred space of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

How did Pussy Riot manage to blur the distinction between the sacred and profane? What type of source is drawn upon by Pussy Riot to manifest their grievances? Nicholas Denysenko asserts that Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* highlights how the use of rhetorical repertoires is aimed at giving legitimacy to the expression of grievances.<sup>167</sup> The five performers showed a will to belong to the Church and deployed the same type of language as that utilised by Patriarch Kyrill, but to subvert his role.<sup>168</sup>

Hence, the analysis of Pussy Riot's performance is paradigmatic, showing how the use of rhetorical language aims to add legitimacy to the protest. However, if on the one hand, legitimacy is necessary to convey a message that can be supported by other individuals, on the other hand, it seems to be counter-productive. The use of rhetorical language marks protest actions as an alternative to an established and institutionalised system, defining two irreconcilable poles.

### 6.1.1 Rhetoric and Public Good in Protest Action

There are several features of Pussy Riot's performance that frame it within a narrative of rhetoric and protest actions. These span from the context in which the performance was staged – the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour is in fact regarded as the primal seat for the Russian Orthodox Church – to the content of the lyrics and gestures adopted during the staging of *Punk Prayer*.

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Affair”. p. 223

165 Prozorov, “Pussy Riot and the Politics of Profanation: Parody, Performativity, Veridiction”.

166 Ibid.

167 Denysenko, “An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot’s Punk Performance in Moscow”.

168 Ibid.

In the framework of protest studies, Rhys Williams suggests that protest groups deploy a repertoire of recognisable rhetoric and symbols.<sup>169</sup> These, on the one hand, constrain the range of political discourse. That is, the political discourse is framed within a specific subject, i.e. Pussy Riot's denunciation of corruption and lack of freedom in Russia. On the other hand, the adoption of symbolic and rhetorical repertoire is aimed to make the protester's claim more recognisable and therefore legitimate. Consequently, Rhys Williams affirms that the use of rhetoric by protest groups is aimed at the definition of a public good,<sup>170</sup> i.e. the use of Virgin Mary as the mediator who can break the unholy alliance between the Russian church and state and free Russian people from their oppressors.

In particular a public good is defined by sociologist Dieter Opp as “any good such that if any person x, in a group consumes it, it cannot probably be refused from others in that group”.<sup>171</sup> The aim of protest groups is not simply to manifest grievances. Rather, it is to frame them within a language and a message that can be embraced by others. Opp maintains in fact that protest actions are a “joint (i.e. collective) action of individuals aimed at achieving their goal or goals by influencing the decision of a target.”<sup>172</sup> This is supported by sociologist Ralph Turner's analysis of perceptions of protest action. Hence, the aim of protest actions is to move other individuals on the protester's behalf.

In the paper “The Public Perception of Protest”, Turner reports that the elements characterising any protest actions are the following:

*[T]he action expresses a grievance, a conviction of wrong or injustice; the protestors are unable to correct the condition directly by their own efforts; the action is intended to draw attention to the grievances; the action is further meant to provoke ameliorative steps by some target group; and the protestors depend upon some combination of sympathy and fear to move the target group in their behalf.*<sup>173</sup>

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169 Williams, “Constructing the Public Good: Social Movements and Cultural Resources”.

170 Ibid.

171 Opp, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements : A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis*. p. 47

172 Ibid. p. 39

173 Turner, “The Public Perception of Protest”.

In this respect Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* at an initial level of analysis seems to be an expression of grievances towards the political situation in Russia, offering a sharp criticism of the alliance between the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kyrill and President Vladimir Putin (from the lyrics: "The Church's praise of rotten dictators/The cross-bearer procession of black limousines/A teacher-preacher will meet you at school/Go to class—bring him money!/Patriarch Gundyaev believes in Putin/Bitch, better believe in God instead/The belt of the Virgin can't replace mass-meetings/Mary, Mother of God, is with us in protest!").<sup>174</sup>

However, the performance should not be simply regarded as an appeal to Mary to "put Putin away."<sup>175</sup> From an analysis of the lyrics Denysenko suggests that Pussy Riot's aim is "to capture the attention of the most general portion of its intended audience: the pedestrian Orthodox Christian in Russia."<sup>176</sup> Denysenko in fact argues that Pussy Riot are aligning themselves not simply with marginalised people, i.e. "supporters of gay pride who are sent away to Siberia; and with feminists."<sup>177</sup> Rather, the performers are attempting to reach also the parishioners who, to some degree, are marginalised too (from the lyrics: "Black robe, golden epaulettes, All parishioners crawl to bow").<sup>178</sup> As Denysenko argues, Orthodox people are depicted as marginalised because the Church and its leaders expect them to blindly obey their directives.<sup>179</sup>

However, in order to manifest grievance and to capture the attention of the Orthodox parishioners and the marginalised groups in Russia, the message requires legitimation. In other words, *Punk Prayer* must utilise a language that can be familiar as well as persuasive when it comes to define a public good that can be embraced by other individuals. This is achieved through the use of rhetoric and particularly through symbolic gestures of devotion and motif belonging to Orthodox piety.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Rumens, "Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* Is Pure Protest Poetry".

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Denysenko, "An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot's Punk Performance in Moscow". p. 1071

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p. 1070

<sup>178</sup> Rumens, "Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* Is Pure Protest Poetry".

<sup>179</sup> Denysenko, "An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot's Punk Performance in Moscow".

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

What is rhetoric and what does it imply? How did Pussy Riot manage to reach their audience?

Italian scholar Giorgio Colli explains that rhetoric is a potent means of communication that was developed in ancient Greece when debates became public.<sup>181</sup> In *La Nascita della Filosofia* (literally “The Rise of Philosophy”), Colli asserts that in ancient Greece, discussion of the rules and laws that regulated the polis was initially articulated through dialectics. This was a form of debate where two opponents challenged each other on specific topics. More importantly, these debates were usually private and attended by a selected audience that could follow, understand and eventually participate in the sophistication of the arguments debated.<sup>182</sup>

Colli writes that after the fifth century BC, these debates started to become open to a wider audience.<sup>183</sup> In other words, the audience was no longer selected but comprised people who could attend the discussion with the intention of only listening to it. This shift from a selected to a more heterogeneous audience necessitated that the speaker develop a different form of communication: rhetoric. In rhetorical speeches, Colli points out that the subject who speaks must persuade the audience through a combination of bodily gestures and words while the role of the audience is to evaluate what is presented and eventually compare it with the presentation of other speakers.<sup>184</sup>

### 6.1.2 *Punk Prayer's* Use of Rhetoric

To frame this account of rhetoric within Pussy Riot's performance, Denysenko suggests that “[*Punk Prayer's*] inclusion of a traditional prayer motif is not only creative, but also renders them a degree of Orthodox legitimacy.”<sup>185</sup> This legitimacy is achieved by four main factors. First is the political context in which the performance was staged. Denysenko points out that the decision to perform

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<sup>181</sup> Colli, *La Nascita Della Filosofia*.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Denysenko, “An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot’s Punk Performance in Moscow”. p. 1071

*Punk Prayer* on 21 February was deliberate: “[It] occurred shortly after the Moscow celebrations venerating the visit of Mary’s Belt, which was fresh in the people’s memory.”<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, as Denysenko reports, the end of 2011 was characterised by two other important facts: the large public protest that took place in December 2011 demanding that Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev resign.<sup>187</sup> Putin was in fact criticised for having orchestrated his own election as president. Second, criticisms were made of Patriarch Kyrill and his perceived wealth – referenced in the song by the lyrics “the cross-bearer procession of black limousines.”<sup>188</sup>

The second factor is the venue in which *Punk Prayer* was staged. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour is regarded as the primal seat of the Russian Orthodox Church. Hence, in the next sub-section the analysis of the cathedral will reveal its importance in the Russian cultural context.

The third factor consists of the physical occupation of the *ambo*.<sup>189</sup> This is regarded as an off-limits area for non-clergymen. Denysenko reports how Kyrill frequently addresses his homilies from this area of the Cathedral. Therefore, the aim of the occupation of this area by Pussy Riot was to symbolically subvert Kyrill's power.<sup>190</sup>

Fourth and last, Pussy Riot deploys a combination of gestures and motifs belonging to Orthodox piety. These comprise the gesture of prostration and the sign of the Cross, which are regarded as devotional acts in Orthodox piety, before the performance of *Punk Prayer*; the adoption of motifs from Rachmaninov’s *Vigil*, one of the most important melodies utilised by choirs in the Orthodox tradition during Mass; and finally, the use of Mary, mother of God, to overthrow the alleged unholy alliance between the Russian Church and government.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid. p. 1083

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Rumens, “Pussy Riot’s *Punk Prayer* Is Pure Protest Poetry”.

<sup>189</sup> Denysenko, “An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot’s Punk Performance in Moscow.””.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

As noted above, the combination of these four elements aims to provide legitimacy and familiarity for *Punk Prayer*'s intended audience. However, the use of a rhetorical repertoire can be said to have been so successful as to have turned the performance into a profanation of the Orthodox form of prayer. As scholar Sergei Prozorov asserts, "what remains intolerable is the profanatory use of prayer, which overcomes its separation from any political use other than the ceaseless glorification of the sovereign, be it heavenly or earthly."<sup>192</sup> This last aspect related to the profanation of prayer and the blurring of the line between sacred and profane will be developed in the second section of this chapter.

A close examination of the relationship between protest actions and use of rhetorical language has revealed how the use of symbolic gestures in *Punk Prayer* aims to give familiarity and legitimacy to the action. Pussy Riot deploys a language that is aimed to persuade an intended audience in order to move this on the protester's behalf. Before examining in detail the aspects related to the profanatory use of both prayer and the sacred space of the Cathedral, the investigation will proceed with an analysis of the importance of Christ the Saviour. This will highlight the role played by the Russian Church in the process of shaping the identity of post-Soviet Russian society. This will be linked with the first aspect concerning the profanation, the occupation of the *ambo*.

### **6.1.3 The context of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour and the new role of the Russian Orthodox Church**

Pivotal to understanding *Punk Prayer*'s underpinnings is an analysis of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. Nicholas Denysenko writes that since it was rebuilt in early 2000, "it became the most visible centre of the Moscow Patriarchate, the preferred venue for patriarchal liturgical celebrations, not only for high feasts but also for other symbolic events."<sup>193</sup> In particular Denysenko outlines the significance that the Cathedral has gained since its reconstruction. More importantly, he also outlines how the importance of Christ the Saviour is

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192 Prozorov, "Pussy Riot and the Politics of Profanation: Parody, Performativity, Veridiction". p. 776

193 Denysenko, "An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot's Punk Performance in Moscow". p. 1064

somehow fuelled by the several liturgical events it hosts. This second aspect is directly related to Tschumi's definition of the "violence of architecture":<sup>194</sup> the intensity with which the importance of the Cathedral is shaped through its use.

An analysis of the account provided by two scholars (Ekaterina Haskins, Professor in Rhetorical Studies and National Identities and Dmitri Sidorov, a scholar in cultural geography) reveals the link between the shaping of new Russian identity and the renewed role of the Russian Orthodox Church in this process. Additionally, the two papers were written prior both to the rise to power of Putin and Kyrill, and Pussy Riot's performance.

Ekaterina Haskins, in the paper "The Cathedral of Christ the Savior and the Reimagining of National Identity", asserts that the idea behind the decision to rebuild the Christ the Saviour served as a reversal of the Communist practice of eradicating religion.<sup>195</sup> Stalin in fact ordered Christ the Saviour's destruction in 1931 to be replaced by the never-built Palace of the Soviet. As reported by Haskins, this building would have symbolised the Cathedral's ideological antipode.<sup>196</sup>

This hypothesis is supported by scholar Dmitri Sidorov in the paper "National Monumentalization and the Politics of Scale: The Resurrection of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow". Sidorov points out that as the Cathedral was built in 1881 to commemorate the victory of Russia over Napoleon, Christ the Saviour represented the unity of religion, Russian population and state. The victory over Napoleon was in fact regarded as a result of the people's resistance and civilian heroism. Additionally, the victory was also considered the result of a holy war. Therefore, in an anti-tsarist vein and to remark on the relationship between the Communist government and the population, the Cathedral was considered the symbol of the past regime. Therefore it was destroyed.<sup>197</sup>

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194 Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*. pp. 82-120 (Italian Version).

195 Haskins, "Russia's Postcommunist Past: The Cathedral of Christ the Savior and the Reimagining of National Identity".

196 Ibid.

197 Sidorov, "National Monumentalization and the Politics of Scale: The Resurrections of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow".



Illustration 29: Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in 1903. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons

The original Cathedral project, although it was never fully realised, was massive. As described by Sidorov, the edifice was 230 metres high with a dome 50 metres in diameter. According to Sidorov “the architectural scale of the project was to signify the spiritual leadership of Russia in the post-Napoleonic world. At the same time, it was perhaps the first attempt to build a national cathedral-monument [...]”<sup>198</sup> The project's architect, Alexander Vitberg, envisioned these values through the overlapping of three levels: a subterranean rectangular temple, a cross-shaped temple in the middle and a circular temple at the top. Sidorov reports that these three levels “symbolise Christ's nativity, transfiguration and resurrection” in a vertical development.<sup>199</sup>

The rebuilding process of Christ the Saviour was accompanied by controversies surrounding the new project. In particular they concerned its cost

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid. p. 555

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. p. 555



and the “resurrection”<sup>200</sup> of the old building. The Cathedral, as Sidorov reports, was in fact funded by the Russian state.<sup>201</sup> However, its cost was over 340 million dollars. In this respect, Denysenko describes how, in that specific period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian economy was still fledgling and characterised by a high unemployment rate and the volatility of its currency. Additionally, criticisms pointed to the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church already had several other symbolic venues in Moscow. Therefore, the decision to invest public money in rebuilding a new and expensive edifice to host a church was regarded as superfluous.<sup>202</sup>

The decision to replicate the old cathedral was also sharply criticised. Sidorov outlines how the use of modern materials to build the new Cathedral of Christ the Saviour would have falsified the historical heritage.<sup>203</sup> In other words, the glorious and symbolic past of the original Cathedral and the best work of Russian craftsmanship, sculptors and painters had been irremediably lost in the 1931 destruction.<sup>204</sup> Haskins describes the debate surrounding the decision to reconstruct the Cathedral, pointing to other proposals that were presented: in particular, the project designed by Russian artist Seliverstov consisting of a steel-contoured structure and the reconstruction of only the main altar. The project would have replicated the shape and scale of the previous building, emphasising the memory of the previous cathedral. However, the open framed structure would have allowed a mixed use, according to people's interpretation. In this respect, memories of the Cathedral's past would have been combined with the hope of a new future for Russia.<sup>205</sup>

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200 Ibid. The term “resurrection” is used by Sidorov in the paper. However, it was explicitly used during the official speeches by the Orthodox Catholic Church. The name of the speaker was not identifiable from Sidorov's paper.

201 Ibid.

202 Denysenko, “An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot’s Punk Performance in Moscow”.

203 Sidorov, “National Monumentalization and the Politics of Scale: The Resurrections of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow”. p.

204 Ibid.

205 Haskins, “Russia’s Postcommunist Past: The Cathedral of Christ the Savior and the Reimagining of National Identity”.



Illustration 30: Project for Christ the Saviour by I. Seliverstov (Not built). Source Rodina

Within these controversies, the reconstruction process signalled a new role for the Russian Orthodox Church. Sidorov writes that the Orthodox Church rose as the new national reconciler. Sidorov's use of the expression "resurrection" with regards to Christ the Saviour does not appear therefore as haphazard. In two important public speeches the Russian Orthodox Church took an official position with regard to the importance of the Cathedral's reconstruction. It called on Russian people to consider the significance that the resurrection of the Cathedral would have symbolised: the reawakening of the patriotic past, which directly involved the participation of the Russian population; and the resurrection of Russia under the aegis of a new and more solid relationship between the state and the church.<sup>206</sup>

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206 Sidorov, "National Monumentalization and the Politics of Scale: The Resurrections of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow".

#### 6.1.4 The link between spaces and events in Christ the Saviour

From this initial account, the historical value of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour can be analysed together with the aspect of ideology that seems to have accompanied this building across all its phases. In particular, the reconstruction seems to have been undertaken under the auspices of an already established identity for the Cathedral, which recalls the unborn child example described by philosopher Althusser in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in fact appears already to have had a clear identity even before it was rebuilt: that of becoming the most prominent symbol of the nascent post-Soviet Russia under the reconciliatory role of the Russian Church. In other words, even when the project was still on paper, the Cathedral seemed to be already provided with an undeniable status and expected to be irreplaceable.<sup>207</sup>

To move the arguments concerning the value of Christ the Saviour into an architectural framework, it is possible to affirm that the identity of the Cathedral has been shaped and constructed by the events and actions carried out in its space by architectural users. Bernard Tschumi in this respect writes that “actions qualify spaces as much as spaces qualify actions [...]”<sup>208</sup> Tschumi’s definition points to a deep relationship between architectural spaces and events. This relationship is represented by the intrusion of bodies into space, which consequently determines an intrusion of one order into another. In order to explain this relationship between spaces and events, Tschumi uses the metaphor of violence. He asserts, “by ‘violence,’ I do not mean the brutality that destroys

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207 Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (notes towards an Investigation)”. In particular, Althusser provides the example of an individual who is always-already a subject. That is to say, an individual who has an identity and is recognised as a subject. The example in particular concerns the expectations around the unborn child and the fact that even before the child is born it is expected that s/he will bear his/her father's name. In this respect, the child is already irreplaceable. S/he is already a subject with an undeniable identity. This last aspect is supported by recent developments. Since Patriarch Kyrill's election in 2009, the Cathedral's identity has been ostensibly shaped by public and liturgical events. As reported by Denysenko are attended by both the Russian political elite, through reserved seats inside the Cathedral, and by Russian citizens. The scholar asserts that the sacred space of the Cathedral serves a particular function that relates it with the mission of the Russian Church. See also Denysenko, “An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot’s Punk Performance in Moscow.”

208 Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*.

physical or emotional integrity but a metaphor for the intensity of a relationship between individuals and their surrounding spaces.”<sup>209</sup> This relationship and its intensity refer both to human bodies violating architectural spaces through their use and, conversely, to architectural space programmed to force human bodies into the space. This last concept is defined by Tschumi as violence ritualised. It implies a frozen relationship between actions and spaces. In other words, actions are determined or controlled by the nature of the space.<sup>210</sup> In this respect, the ritual should not be intended as simply that expected during liturgical Mass, with all the symbolic gestures and sequences of prayers and songs. Rather, what emerges from the analysis of Christ the Saviour as a symbol of the power of the Russian Orthodox Church, is that the ritualised series of events hosted at the Cathedral is aimed at becoming a programme.<sup>211</sup> The programme and the architectural space of the Cathedral, as Tschumi writes, become “totally interdependent and fully condition each other's existence.”<sup>212</sup>

As noted above, the importance of the Cathedral has been shaped through several liturgical encounters organised by the Patriarch Kyrill and attended by prominent members of the new political establishment. Furthermore, the Cathedral's importance was also fuelled by Kirill's attempt to enlarge Russian people's participation in church life. This process culminated in November 2011, when the relics of the belt belonging to Mary, mother of Jesus, was moved from the Vatopedi Monastery of Mount Athos to Christ the Saviour. On that occasion, Patriarch Kyrill appealed Mary to impart divine grace to the Russian people and invited the population to visit the belt. This invitation was followed by a visit of over three million citizens.<sup>213</sup> In this respect, Patriarch Kyrill can be seen as the

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209 Ibid. p. 122

210 Ibid.

211 The meaning of programme in an architectural framework, can be addressed by taking into account a military idea of order and control. This is discussed by philosopher Manuel De Landa in the article *Beyond the Problematic of Legitimacy: Military Influences on Civilian Society*. De Landa, makes a parallel between society and the influence that the military order had on this one through architecture. With reference to the signification of programme De Landa utilises the word routine that by quoting Foucault: It is rather a collective and obligatory rhythm, imposed from the outside; it is a ‘programme’; it assures the elaboration of the act itself; it controls its development and its stages from the inside.

212 Ibid. p. 159

213 Denysenko, “An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot’s Punk Performance in Moscow”.

architect who, as Tschumi writes, “designs the set, writes the script and directs the actors.”<sup>214</sup>

#### 6.1.5 *Punk Prayer* as a disjunctive event

However, if the reciprocal interweave between events and action inscribes the Cathedral into an ideological programme as its physical manifestation, then, as Tschumi suggests, a contradictory programme is also able to make a space attain new meanings. These type of events are called disjunctions by Tschumi. Disjunctive events aim to provoke a dissociation of the logic that determines the making of architectural space, i.e. the programme of liturgical events promoted by Patriarch Kyrill.<sup>215</sup>



Illustration 31: Pussy Riot's prostrating before performing Punk Prayer. Source The Guardian

It is within this framework that Pussy Riot's occupation of the *ambo*, the off-limits area reserved to clergymen, can be intended as a profanation of the architectural space of the church. As noted above, Pussy Riot begins the

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214 Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*. p.128

215 Tschumi, *Architecture Concepts : Red Is Not a Color*.

performance with a gesture of prostration and the sign of the cross. These are regarded as acts of respect and legitimation in Russian Orthodox piety. Denysenko writes that this aspect “was not intended to mock but to illustrate the women’s desire to belong to the Church.”<sup>216</sup> It shows Pussy Riot’s familiarity with Orthodox piety, while attempting to give a degree of legitimacy to *Punk Prayer*. Additionally, Denysenko points out that the occupation of the *ambo* by the five performers was aimed to be “a symbolic subversion of the Church’s power.”<sup>217</sup> The *ambo* was used by Pussy Riot to perform a prayer, an appeal to Mary to remove both Putin and Kyrill. Finally, the performance was recorded and broadcast on YouTube. The profanation of the architectural space of the Cathedral then became a profanation of what gives significance to the architectural space of the Cathedral – the role played by Patriarch Kyrill. Denysenko in fact points out that the effective kernel of *Punk Prayer* does not lie only in the fact the occupation is carried out by a non-clerical group of women. Rather, it lies in the fact that Pussy Riot’s performance utilises the same sources as Kyrill’s. However, their message is used to subvert his agenda, appealing to Mary to stop the oppression perpetrated by the unholy alliance between the state and the Church.<sup>218</sup>

This analysis of Christ the Saviour has revealed its symbolic relevance throughout Russian history while the reconstruction process has marked a new role for the Russian Orthodox Church in post-Communist Russia. The analysis of Kyrill’s propagandistic agenda as developed through Bernard Tschumi’s account of the relationship between the programme of events and actions, on the one hand, has highlighted the process of the making of architecture and the shaping of the identity of Christ the Saviour. On the other hand it has shown the profanatory aspect related to Pussy Riot’s occupation of the *ambo* as the antithesis, to subvert Kyrill’s agenda. Pussy Riot deploys the same rhetorical language as the Patriarch but aims to subvert his role and consequently the identity of the Cathedral. As intimated in the introduction, the artistic collective Metahaven explains that the subversion of the programme cannot be achieved only through the occupation. Rather, it requires another level of disruption, that

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216 Denysenko, “An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot’s Punk Performance in Moscow”. p. 1071

217 Ibid. p. 1069

218 Ibid.

of communication.<sup>219</sup> In the next section, the chapter will look further into the form deployed by Pussy Riot to perform *Punk Prayer*. In particular this has been regarded as a profanation of the use of prayer. The analysis of the account provided by scholar Sergei Prozorov will reveal that *Punk Prayer's* use of rhetorical and symbolic gestures aims at making the performance into a serious parody.

## 6.2 Performing Profanation: A Serious P(r)unk Prayer

Metahaven, in their analysis of the relationship between the use of prunks and protest movements, assert that these are “an attempt to negate the form of legitimate rational debate as they might have naturally otherwise presumed.”<sup>220</sup> According to the collective, jokes and “prunks” are a “disruption of an existing order of ‘sense-making’ [...]”<sup>221</sup> This hypothesis is supported by Prozorov, who asserts that *Punk Prayer* was a profanation of the proper use of prayer. In particular, he points out that *Punk Prayer's* subversive aspect cannot be intended as a mockery of religious rituals. It does not simply attempt to weaken the institutional force of prayer and religious rituals, moving these into a comic context. Rather, as Prozorov suggests, “[*Punk Prayer*] seeks to reclaim this force by returning it to free use.”<sup>222</sup>

At an initial level of analysis, it can be argued that this is due to the nature of the performance itself, consisting of a combination of occupation of the *ambo* and performing a (punk) prayer. Metahaven in fact points out that jokes, to be effective, must be combined with other protest repertoires such as the occupation of space. In other words, the disruption, taking place at different levels, i.e. the physical space of the Cathedral and the communicative use of prayer, aims to negate any form of mediation, marking the difference between spectacle and antagonism. As the collective writes, in these cases “[o]ne cannot surmount counter-claims through ‘debating’ in content, instead, negation of the form and structure through which they seek to extend their identities and reproduce

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219 Metahaven, *Can Jokes Bring Down Governments?: Memes, Design and Politics*. p. 30

220 Metahaven, *Can Jokes Bring Down Governments?: Memes, Design and Politics*. p. 27

221 Ibid.

222 Prozorov, “Pussy Riot and the Politics of Profanation: Parody, Performativity, Veridiction”. p. 768

themselves as agents should be seen as imperative.”<sup>223</sup> In other words, as maintained by Prozorov, while Pussy Riot's detractors aimed at describing the performance as simply a joke, the persecution and consequent incarceration of the punk band members cannot possibly be motivated by the fact that *Punk Prayer* was to be simply interpreted as a “prunk” or a joke.<sup>224</sup>

Prozorov furthermore points out that the attempts by both Pussy Riot's detractors and supporters to characterise *Punk Prayer* as a comic parody during the trial robs the performance of its political content. During the trial the performance was often compared with anti-religious campaigns of the Soviet regime during the 1920s and 1930s. It has already been mentioned that the most extreme case was the destruction of Christ the Saviour in 1931. However, Prozorov argues that there is a significant difference between anti-religious propaganda and Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer*. While Soviet regime's anti-religious campaigns sought to undermine religion in order to weaken the political and social influence of the Russian Church on people, Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* does not.<sup>225</sup> Conversely, as asserted by Byzantine and Orthodox studies scholar Nicholas Denysenko and supported by the previous analysis of disjunctive events, Pussy Riot's performance is an appeal to Mary to undermine the Russian Church's strategy and Kyrill's orchestration of liturgical events to inaugurate the restoration of Russia through the intercession of the Virgin Mary.<sup>226</sup>

Pussy Riot are, according to Denysenko, utilising Virgin Mary as a mediator, investing in Her the same role as Patriarch Kyrill did during the liturgical events at Christ the Saviour in resolving serious Russian societal problems, i.e. in removing both Putin and Kyrill.<sup>227</sup> In this respect, Prozorov suggests that Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer* should be intended not as a comic parody but rather as a serious parody, which makes the serious speakable as serious and resonates with the aspect of profanation of the practice of prayer. As discussed above, profanation aims to overcome the work of separation of an object into distinct (sacred) spheres. This is in contrast with the aim of religion. As the scholar points

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223 Metahaven, *Can Jokes Bring Down Governments?: Memes, Design and Politics*. p. 30

224 Prozorov, “Pussy Riot and the Politics of Profanation: Parody, Performativity, Veridiction”.

225 Ibid.

226 Denysenko, “An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot’s Punk Performance in Moscow”.

227 Ibid.



out religion “removes things, places, animals or people from common use and transfers them to a separate sphere.”<sup>228</sup> This hypothesis is supported by Denysenko's claim that “[the performance] symbolised the collision of profane and sacred in the cathedral's sacred space.”<sup>229</sup> While researching Pussy Riot's performance as a disjunctive event, the example provided by Bernard Tschumi of the Sistine Chapel being used for pole-vaulting events<sup>230</sup> was inspirational to the account of serious parody. Hence, what is at stake here seems to be akin to the similar controversial aspects concerning Michelangelo's famous painting *The Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel.<sup>231</sup>

This digression into Michelangelo's *The Last Judgement* serves the purpose of elucidating some of the performative aspects related to profanation. In this respect, the aim is to analyse Michelangelo's work in conjunction with Pussy Riot performance to clarify arguments that will be then used in comparison with the inhabitation of public space by people who are homeless.

#### 6.2.1 The Meaning of Profanation in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*

According to Italian art historian and scholar Gianluigi Colalucci, Michelangelo's *The Last Judgement*, in its representation of a biblical story, can be viewed as an act of protest. In 1504, Pope Julius II nominated Michelangelo Buonarroti as the artist in charge of painting the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo's idea, Gianluigi Colalucci argues, was not simply to make a decoration of surfaces. On the contrary, by using painted architectural elements, Michelangelo wanted to include frescoes in the Sistine chapel's architecture in order to modify without violating the chapel itself.<sup>232</sup> Colalucci asserts in fact that the Sistine Chapel was originally a simple edifice with no particular architectural features.

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228 Prozorov, “Pussy Riot and the Politics of Profanation: Parody, Performativity, Veridiction”. p. 774

229 Denysenko, “An Appeal to Mary: An Analysis of Pussy Riot's Punk Performance in Moscow”. p. 1084

230 Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*.

231 This is supported by the interview I had with Mr Gianluigi Colalucci. He is a renowned Italian art historian and led the last restoration of the Sistine Chapel in the 1990s. The interview was meant to clarify aspects related to protest in Michelangelo's painting, which revealed the link between profanation and *The Last Judgement*. The interview took place in May 2013.

232 Mancinelli, Colalucci, and Gabrielli, *Last Judgement*.

Michelangelo's aim therefore was to utilise painted architectural elements to emphasise the nature of the building and make them resonate with the religious aim of the Chapel. In fact, three walls and the vault have painted architectural elements that frame biblical stories, while the wall containing *The Last Judgement* opens outwards, having the sky as background.



Illustration 32: Michelangelo's *The Last Judgement*.  
Source Wikimedia

Despite the magnificence achieved by this work, the Church considered Michelangelo's frescoes, notably *The Last Judgement*, controversial and ambiguous. Debate during the Council of Trent (1545–63) focused on the subversive nature of Michelangelo's representation of the Church, not as the mediating element for deciding the destiny of those sent to Heaven or Hell. This non-canonical choice, although revolutionary, was Michelangelo's biggest shame before a Church ravaged by the rise of Protestantism.

Colalucci, during the interview, compared Michelangelo's *The Last Judgement* with the same subject painted by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. Giotto's painting represents an example of what was considered the canonical

way of representing this biblical story. The painting can be read on three different levels. The bottom contains, on the right, the church and, on the left, Hell. in the middle there is Christ with all the apostles and at the top is Paradise, represented by angels and saints. The narration is hierarchical. The church in Giotto's painting functions effectively as the mediator, marking a clear distinction between those destined for Paradise and those destined for Hell.



Illustration 33: Giotto's The Last Judgement.  
Source [scrovegnichapel.it](http://scrovegnichapel.it)

While in Giotto's painting each element of the narration belongs to a precise canonical sphere, Michelangelo's Last Judgement expresses a fundamentally different and profane condition. By replacing the role of the Church as the mediator of Christ on Earth with Christ Himself, Michelangelo wrapped the entire narration in an unstable and dynamic vortex where the just and sinners, saints, demons and even the Church's leaders are all together. In particular, profanation is not just the dislocation of the line that separates objects into sacred or canonical spheres; it could be, at a first level of analysis, the difference between Michelangelo's and Giotto's paintings. Rather, profanation while dislocating

these lines, as Prozorov writes, “does not negate the content of what is separated within them”.<sup>233</sup> Comic parody dislocates the lines that separate what is regarded as sacred from the profane, turning the serious into comedy. Profanation, by contrast, leaves this content unaltered, rendering inoperative its canonical use: Michelangelo's painting effectively denies the canonical role of the Church, while maintaining the force of the subject just as much. The same occurs with Pussy Riot's *Punk Prayer*. In this sense, it is possible to argue that the form of the message opens itself up to free use. Profanation, as Prozorov points out, becomes a performative action that exposes institutions to their own atrophy: the secularisation through which religious messages, canonical rituals and prayer are constrained into spheres. These spheres, as Tschumi's account of ritualised violence points out, freeze religious messages, rituals and prayer. On the one hand, as Prozorov suggests, these become vain, in other words emptied of semantic context. On the other hand, in order to maintain a degree of legitimacy and obedience they are bound to strict regulations.

It is in this framework that profanation has to be intended as performative. It is not performative as a felicitous act.<sup>234</sup> That is, to follow Austin's account of speech act theory, the prayer performed by Pussy Riot does not remove Putin or Kyrill through the intercession of Mary. Rather, *Punk Prayer* is performative in its illocutionary sense: it is not uttered in vain in its denunciation of Kyrill's promises as vacuous. It frees prayer and the place in which it is staged from their canonical sphere, opening them to free and non-canonical use.<sup>235</sup>

### 6.3 Profanation and Performativity in Public Space

After having explained the underpinnings behind Pussy Riot's performance, it is possible to move the arguments developed so far into an architectural discourse, which represents the conclusion of this chapter. The series of analyses of Pussy Riot's performance unveils how the type of profanation carried out by the punk

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233 Prozorov, “Pussy Riot and the Politics of Profanation: Parody, Performativity, Veridiction”. p. 774

234 Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. For a comparison with Austin's speech act theory and other accounts on performativity see: Miller, *Performativity as Performance/Performativity as Speech Act: Derrida's Special Theory of Performativity*.

235 Prozorov, “Pussy Riot and the Politics of Profanation: Parody, Performativity, Veridiction”.

band can be compared with that manufactured in public space in its appropriation by people who are rough sleepers. The act of inhabiting public space can be said to make inoperative the conventional (and customary) use of architectural space, while outlining how this is performative. The aspect of architectural space as performative, as Prozorov's account of Pussy Riot's performance seems to suggest, should not be intended as a felicitous act. The architectural promise is inherent in performativity: the promise that implies that a door will lead to a room or that a staircase leads to a determinate floor (or simply upwards or downwards) or that a portico area in St Peter's Square can be used as a sheltered area by people who are rough sleepers. Rather, the argument implies that architectural spaces can be constantly profaned by the range of practices that take place in urban spaces. In this act of profanation, the undermining of the secularisation that constrains the private sphere within domestic walls and the public sphere in the "do not do anything strange so that you do not hurt the other" architectural space can be intended as the site of a variety of unconventional uses, which as discussed in the previous chapter escape from prescribed forms of control.

In this respect Chapter 3 showed how certain practices are regarded as a transgression of customary behaviours in public space because they are perceived as a threat to customary and consumerist use of it. However, what the analysis of Pussy Riot's performative profanation seems to reveal is that the other, i.e. the homeless person, is not regarded as a threat because of his/her diversity. Rather, s/he is a threat because of his/her sameness. In the act of inhabiting public space, s/he exposes the private to the public, dislocating the line that keeps these two spheres separated while maintaining the content unaltered. This unveils the atrophy with which public space is conceived. In other words, public space, along with many other practices, can also be inhabited simply because there are people who unfortunately do not have anywhere to go but there. At this point the architectural question should concern how public space can become an inclusive site for a variety of practices that are not alternative to one another: can a possible architectural intervention facilitate inclusivity while promoting a sense of responsibility towards the other, i.e. be it both a housed and unhoused individual? The question inherent in practices that

become profanatory can be also extended to other examples analysed in this thesis, in particular the action carried out by activists in Nottingham. Through the analysis of the parasitic cascade explained in Chapter 4, it is possible to assume that the same form of exclusion happening with homeless people is directly translated to the action of Fightback in Nottingham. Hence, the chapter reported how their action, the occupation of public ground, was contrasted by that of Nottingham City Council. FightBack effectively replicated, through the use of tents as temporary shelters, the presence of volunteers and the provision of meals, the type of supporting structure that is already provided by institutions and charitable bodies. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that also in this second case, the main threat is related to the language and repertoire utilised to replicate certain customary contents. In other words, as with Pussy Riot, profanation of public space implies a disruption that takes place at two different levels: at a physical level through the appropriation of space and at a communicative one through the replication of a familiar and customary language. However, what all these examples have in common is the fact that the practice is excluded, becoming alternative and antagonist to other regarded-as customary practices.

Jeremy Till, Tatjana Schneider and Nishat Awan, in their analysis of alternative practices, assert that these manufacture a binary condition in which any new practice does not have any possible connection with the superstructure it refers to: “as in any binary structure, the alternative becomes bound by exactly the terms of reference that it would wish to escape. The alternative is always caught in the shadow of the thing that it posits itself against.”<sup>236</sup> In this respect, Slavoj Žižek, in the book *The Parallax View*, adds that:

*the “truth” is not the “real” state of things, that is, the “direct” view of the object without perspectival distortion, but the very Real of the antagonism which causes perspectival distortion. The site of truth is not the way “things really are in themselves,” beyond their perspectival distortions, but the very gap, passage, which separates one perspective from another, the gap (in this case: social antagonism) which makes the two perspectives radically incommensurable.*<sup>237</sup>

Therefore this thesis suggests that we need to rethink profanation and consequent exclusion of any practice as an act that deprives it of its

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<sup>236</sup> Awan, Schneider, and Till, *Spatial Agency : Other Ways of Doing Architecture*. p. 26

<sup>237</sup> Žižek, “Architectural Parallax, Spandrels and Other Phenomena of Class Struggle”. p. 201

performativity. Exclusion impedes any practice's attempt to be able to claim its legitimation and recognition. It is within this optic that the concept of precarity plays a fundamental role to envision the definition of a more inclusive type of public space. If, through Butler's account, performativity was linked with the space of appearance, a space in between individuals where bodies appear performatively, I argue that it is by intending this space as precarious that it is possible to add nuances to a notion of public space as inclusive.

### 6.3.1 The Necessity of Looking at Precarity in Public Space

The analysis conducted in this chapter has aimed to uncover that what is missing in alternative and profanatory practices is precisely awareness of the gap that keeps the practices separate. This is also what this thesis indeed intends to argue: the acknowledgement that there is a gap between two alternative practices and that through this gap possible collaborative solutions can be sought. To translate this into the remit of homelessness and the role that architects can play, what is missing is a mediating device that can convey what has been conceptualised as the precarity of architectural space and of the space of appearance into forms of collaboration.

This aspect of precarity can be understood if framed within the idea of the ephemeral. Already Bernard Tschumi, to complete the discourse about disjunctive events, has invoked the component of the ephemeral in the experience of architectural space. This, as he writes, "is not unlike fireworks, for these 'empirical apparitions', as Adorno puts it, 'produce a delight that cannot be sold or bought, that has no exchange value and cannot be integrated in the production cycle'."<sup>238</sup> However, Tschumi's idea of architectural space as ephemeral implies a more contemporary meaning of the word: as an experience that lasts for a short time. Rather as suggested throughout this thesis the original significance of the word is related to the exposure to precarity of human life: it is not so much a matter of duration of time, but rather the fact that the future as much as everyday life is uncertain, that makes every day ephemeral. Referring to the use of "ephemeral" in ancient Greek culture, it implied the constant exposure

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<sup>238</sup> Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*. p. 47

of human life to precarity due to uncertainty about what might possibly happen in the near future.<sup>239</sup>

In this respect, the idea of precarity is intended by Butler as a possible component for realising mutual forms of collaboration. As she puts it, “[o]ur shared exposure to precarity is but one ground of our potential equality and our reciprocal obligations to produce together conditions of liveable life.”<sup>240</sup> I agree with the definitions provided by these authors: however, it is possible to extend this concept to a fundamental feature that precarity implies. Hence, I argue that precarious circumstances make explicit an awareness concerning the fact that certain actions or events may harm (and to an extent even disrupt) a determined system. This thesis makes the argument that this acknowledgement can potentially entail an awareness of the gap between practices and sociocultural domains that would remain otherwise alternative. It is the reproduction of this condition, rather than the one described in Chapter 2 i.e. the accident, that has the potential to realise forms of mutual support among people belonging to diverse sociocultural spheres and create the condition to conceive more inclusive public spaces.

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239 See Chapter 2. Susanetti, *Atene post-occidentale : spettri antichi per la democrazia contemporanea*.

240 Butler, “Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life? Adorno Prize Lecture”. p. 18





## **7 Legitimacy, Illegitimacy and Familiarisation in Public Space: the Example of Parkour**

This chapter aims to complete the argument developed in Chapter 4 concerning the different perception of people who are homeless when they are encountered on the street and at St Mary's Convent in Edinburgh. Partly, this chapter also questions aspects related to profanation of public space, but under a different perspective.

The principal purpose of this chapter is to show one of the core concepts around which this doctoral thesis is structured and that explains the delicacy of the argument related to public space, inclusiveness and homelessness: as maintained by Jeremy Till, Jon Goodbun, Michael Klein and Andreas Rumfhuber, in *The Design of Scarcity*, "solving the problem of scarcity is only very partial: it often doesn't address the underlying reasons as to how that scarcity has been designed in the first instance."<sup>241</sup> In other words, a possible interpretation of the quote above refers to situations where, by legitimising a practice through the institutionalisation of certain processes, i.e. to provide meals or temporary shelters to people who are homeless, may make the practice even more illegitimate when performed in its original context. By illegitimate this thesis intends not simply that the practice may become profanatory, as maintained in the previous chapter. Rather, illegitimacy should be intended as a practice that once performed in concurrence with its origins, it is perceived as unfamiliar. On the one hand, what is affirmed above echoes the argument developed in Chapter 5 regarding the notion of event by Alain Badiou, which entails a notion of inclusion through an institutionalised process, and this is an avenue which is open to further exploration. Equally however, it may be time, to test its usefulness in an empirical study. Therefore, in this chapter the themes outlined so far will be dealt with through the example offered by the urban discipline known as Parkour.

Parkour as a discipline shares many features with the practice of inhabiting the street: the value of community and sharing, the unconventional use of architectural spaces, the exploration of the city and the practice, which can be regarded as an exercise of agency and control of one's individual self. However, the feature that interests the most is that both these practices are suspended

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<sup>241</sup> Jon Goodbun et al., *The Design of Scarcity* p. 35.

between legitimacy and illegitimacy. This claim is mostly based on the literary review carried out of authors who have explored Parkour in the realm of city and architectural space; however, it is also supported by direct interviews with parkour practitioners (traceurs) from both Rome and Gaza, Palestine where the practice is forbidden from being performed on the street.

This chapter also represents the occasion to engage with some examples of actions and architectural interventions in public space that aim to ameliorate the conditions of people who are homeless. Through a critical reading of these examples, the chapter will show how often the attempt to legitimise a practice through mechanisms of familiarisation (institutionalisation) end up turning it into a more unfamiliar (and perhaps illegitimate) practice.

## 7.1 Locating Parkour Between Obstacles and Possibilities

As observed in the introduction, there are many characteristics that the discipline of Parkour shares with the practice of inhabiting the street. Before discussing the element that is at the core of this chapter, it seems useful to provide a brief illustration of Parkour and the pivotal features around which the discipline is structured. However, the section will not aim at making a direct comparison between those elements related to Parkour and homelessness, which are intuitively recognisable in the following description.

Parkour, also known as *Art du déplacement* or *freerunning*, was started in the late 1980s in Lisse, an outer suburban area of Paris, by a group of nine practitioners called Yamakasi.<sup>242</sup> Among these nine practitioners the most prominent figures are David Belle, who is presumed to be<sup>243</sup> the founder of the discipline, and Sébastien Foucan, who introduced the term “freerunning” as an Anglophone adaptation of parkour in the UK. The name parkour has military origins, deriving from French *parcour du combattante* (literally “way of the fighter”). The discipline has, since its origin in Lisse, acquired major popularity

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<sup>242</sup> The word means “strong spirit” or “strong body”. It derives from the Lingala language, spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

<sup>243</sup> Presumably does not intend the fact I have not investigated about Parkour's origins. However, while interviewing parkour practitioners, they outlined the fact David Belle was one of the founders and not the founders.

and undergone expansion around the globe, having been portrayed in movies, commercial adverts and dedicated sponsored events.

Matthew Lamb, scholar in Communication and Art at Penn University and practitioner of parkour himself, defines it in this way:

*[parkour] is centered on overcoming obstacles by executing a series of moves such as jumping, climbing, and vaulting in an effort to efficiently pass over, through, and around any obstacle found in one's environment.*<sup>244</sup>

The discipline involves moving fluidly through urban environments, interpreting objects encountered not as obstacles and barriers but as possibilities. Fabio "Flow" Saraceni, the founder of ADD Roma, a community of traceurs (parkour practitioners) who practice parkour in Tor Bella Monaca, a peripheral neighbourhood of Rome, claims with regards to parkour and its possibilities that: "if a wall looks like a blind alley, through parkour it becomes part of a journey that, exactly where it was about to finish, flows out in a myriad of different ways."<sup>245</sup> However, possibilities in parkour have to be intended in a twofold way. The philosophy at the basis of parkour is concerned with turning obstacles into possibilities, which is not only meant as the challenge faced by traceurs with regard to urban environments; rather, it involves also a process of empowerment for the individual's self-knowledge.

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244 Lamb, "Self and the City: Parkour, Architecture, and the Interstices of the 'Knowable' City". p. 4

245 Saraceni Fabio, "Percorsi Urbani e Mentali – Visioni". Available at <http://www.rhizai.it/Blog-94-Percorsi-urbani-e-mentali---Visioni>



Illustration 34: Fabio "Flow" Saraceni while practicing Parkour

Cultural researcher Nathaniel Bavinton comments, “the philosophy yields a spatial practice that is developed through disciplined training.”<sup>246</sup> Hence, as Fabio “Flow” Saraceni outlines:

*with the practice of PK/Art du déplacement a person acquires a method for self-knowledge. By following a step-by-step path that brings the practitioner ever closer to real awareness of him/herself, the daily training leads [one] to discover one’s own limitations and potentialities. This method involves strong mental effort, which pushes the practitioner to face his/her own fears and overcome them.*<sup>247</sup>

From this initial account of the discipline of parkour, it emerges that the practice acts on a twofold level: one, the urban environment's arrangement and constituency; and two, the practitioner, in the continuous challenge offered to him/her by urban spaces. However, these two aspects are complementary and interrelated. Thus, as Bavinton points out “[t]he creative play characteristic of parkour is not achieved by the abolition of constraints, but by the reinterpretation

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246 Bavinton, “From Obstacle to Opportunity: Parkour, Leisure, and the Reinterpretation of Constraints.” p. 407

247 Saraceni Fabio, “PERCORSI URBANI E MENTALI – VISIONI.” Available at <http://www.rhizai.it/Blog-94-Percorsi-urbani-e-mentali---Visioni>

and negotiated utilisation of constraints.”<sup>248</sup> Traceurs need obstacles. Although the practice challenges the intentionality behind the design of streets, buildings, parks and more generally architectural components as regulatory elements for people's movements, these are at the same time an essential component for the traceur. By transforming these constraints into resources, parkour practitioners establish a relationship with the city as an experience of freedom: As Bavinton writes, “freedom of expression and of choice, freedom from conformity and from constraint.”<sup>249</sup>

It is possible to include the discourse of freedom and exploration in an architectural discourse, framing Parkour as an act of subtle resistance. Juliet Margaret Angel asserts that the way architectural spaces are used by users sees a hierarchical set of relationships that are sequentially called into question. Users, for instance, to have access to their flats, have to first open a main door. Secondly, they have to use stairs or lifts, establishing a second relationship. Finally, users have to open the door of their flat and finally arrive at home. A reverse sequence, then, is triggered the moment users have to go out from their flats. In all these passages, hierarchical relationships are established and every component of the building has a precise role. Main doors, stairs, lifts, and then the arrangement of public space, are all pieces of a discursive narration that acts in a pedagogical way. A contrast between arboreal<sup>250</sup> and rhizomic structures seems to be delineated, as expressed by Deleuze and Guattari.

Hence traceurs are able to become function shifters, avoiding mundane architectural constraints: traceurs cannot walk through walls; however, they can vault over them. The laws of gravity, too, play a part in determining the traceur's interaction with the built environment. Traceurs cannot fly between buildings or over them; however, they can tic tac<sup>251</sup> and climb to the roof or jump from one

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248 Bavinton, “From Obstacle to Opportunity: Parkour, Leisure, and the Reinterpretation of Constraints.” p. 400

249 Ibid. p. 407

250 Especially in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari contrast rhizomic and arboreal structures. Arboreal structures, as described in the account provided by Noam Chomsky, are, according to Deleuze and Guattari, hierarchical. Each member in the structure plays a precise and fixed role in the structure. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

251 The purpose of tic tac from Parkourpedia.com is: “[T]o gain height by jumping from one wall

building to the next.<sup>252</sup> These relationships are neither hierarchical nor redundant, but rather mutual. As asserted by Angel, “[t]he movements in parkour are expressions of the self, participating in and with the environment.”<sup>253</sup> Parkour implies a mutual and interactive relationship between body and architecture. It is a process of reading and interpreting architectural space that determines an array of ways of using architectural elements.

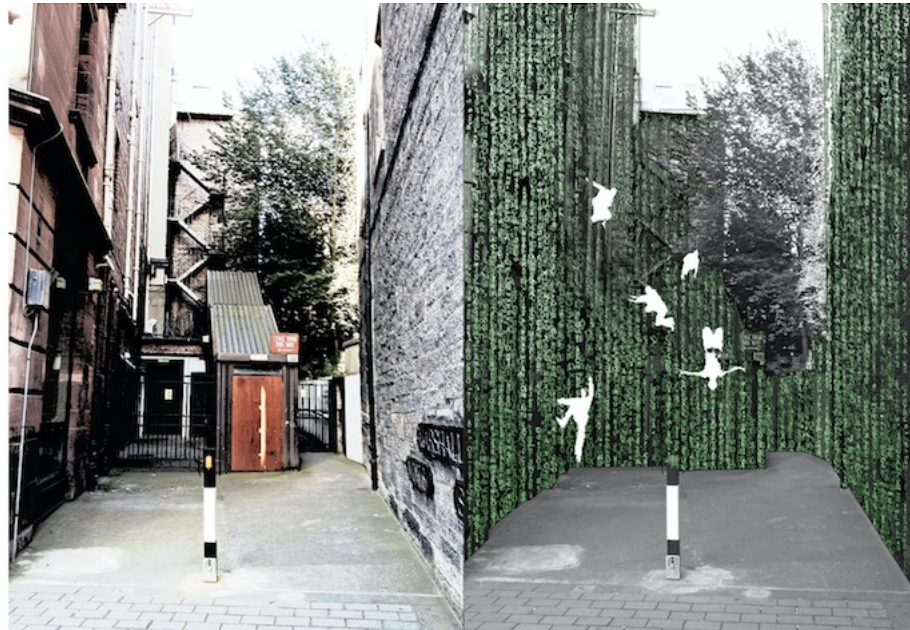


Illustration 35: "This is the way we see | this is the way they see" Image realised for a conference presentation

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to another, to clear objects and to allow quick redirection of momentum". See:  
<https://parkourpedia.com/technique/tic-tac>.

252 Lamb, "Self and the City: Parkour, Architecture, and the Interstices of the 'Knowable' City".

253 Angel, "Cine Parkour: A Cinematic and Theoretical Contribution to the Understanding of the Practice of Parkour". p. 109





Illustration 36: Traceur "tic-tacting". image Source Pinterest.com

The arrangements of architectural space may then be intended as a rhizomic map as described by Deleuze and Guattari in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Hence balconies, pipes, overhangs, masonry, balustrades and walls form points of this map: "[This] is reversible, susceptible of constant transformation [...] and has multiple entryways,"<sup>254</sup> which the parkour practitioner uses by continuously establishing connections. Like the wasp and orchid example, a pipe temporarily de-territorialises itself, becoming a ladder. That is, the pipe changes its function for practitioners of parkour, allowing them to go upwards or downwards. Practitioners, by doing so, re-territorialise the pipe. They re-establish its form, by moving up it to then reach a new point. By establishing these relationships, both the pipe-as-ladder and practitioners of parkour remain detachable and heterogeneous elements. The pipe, although having become a ladder, keeps transporting its liquids, and the practitioner, after having used the pipe-as-ladder, establishes a new relationship with some other architectural element.

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<sup>254</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. p. 33

### 7.1.1 Parkour and Precarity in Public Space: the Value of the Community

The argument regarding the rhizome brings the concept of precarity back to the centre of the discussion, highlighting the value of community around the practice of Parkour.

A similar type of community was described when I reported my experience with people who sleep rough in the portico area near St Peter's Square (Chapter 2 and 3). In particular, I reported how a common exposure to a shared life condition, i.e. rough sleeping, determines forms of mutual collaboration and help. In the case of parkour, it is possible to assert that mutual help is due to the fact that each traceur, while performing his/her own path, is subject to precarity deriving from the breaking of architectural components' conventional uses. Most parkour actions can turn out to be potentially fatal, especially when performed at a high level.<sup>255</sup> Within the rhizomic map, which is made by temporal and mutual relationships between the practitioner and environment, accidents may take place in the same way as those portrayed in the discussion of lying doors and in my experience with *Stalker-Osservatorio Nomade* (both presented in Chapter 2). Parkour therefore pushes individuals to face their fears and other negative emotions.

Matthew Lamb suggests that parkour is possibilities: "The reiteration of *I can* furthers a discourse of parkour, through bodily performances, centred on possibility; a discourse which challenges the conscience and self-knowledge to which subjectivity is tethered."<sup>256</sup> Juliette Margaret Angel asserts that the component of fear is the vehicle through which traceurs establish connections with places and other practitioners. Connections however happen when the practitioners are open and vulnerable.<sup>257</sup> Vulnerability is deeply linked with fear: it implies not only the possibility of getting injured or suffering pain; rather, it also involves revealing one's own identity publicly and one's own abilities and

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255 Angel, "Cine Parkour: A Cinematic and Theoretical Contribution to the Understanding of the Practice of Parkour".

256 Lamb, "Self and the City: Parkour, Architecture, and the Interstices of the 'Knowable' City". p. 11

257 Angel, "Cine Parkour: A Cinematic and Theoretical Contribution to the Understanding of the Practice of Parkour".

limitations. These feelings, publicly experienced and shared by practitioners, according to Angel, challenge the array of possible relationships with an unknown and unfamiliar other, i.e. the general public, just as strongly. In establishing unconventional relationships with architectural components, traceurs train themselves to engage in different types of social relationships: the awareness that each traceur is experiencing the same feelings and precarious conditions determines them to willingly help each other: “One heart, one crew”, as ADD Roma's motto claims.

## 7.2 Parkour between Legitimacy and Deviance

Criminology scholar Thomas Raymen, in a 2014 blog post, discusses contradictory issues at stake with parkour. In particular Raymen asserts:

*[t]he practice and control of parkour exists at the very heart of the nexus between deviance and leisure, as traceurs worldwide porously cross and re-cross the boundary of “legitimacy” and “deviance” in shifting spatial contexts. It is a discipline of minor (if any) social harm, yet it is policed with vigour through a range of agencies.*<sup>258</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 3 concerning the perception of homelessness, anti-homeless regulatory policies and anti-homeless architecture, a similar range of actions is adopted to prevent parkour. Hence, the range of measures listed comprises the use of anti-climb painting, fines, the confiscation of memory cards from traceurs' cameras and bans on practising parkour in public spaces. Raymen describes how in 2009 the city council of Moreton, a small city near Liverpool, decided to ban parkour from public spaces. The reason lay in the assumption that the practice could lead to antisocial behaviour in young people as reported by Caroline Laing from Wirral Council.<sup>259</sup>

With regards to the perception of parkour in public spaces, Angel declares, “[f]or example, a group of traceurs training together can be playful but may be seen as alarmist for local residents or if someone wants to pass by and there are people vaulting railings in the way.”<sup>260</sup> A similar situation is faced by the group of

<sup>258</sup> Raymen, “Re-Thinking Parkour as ‘Resistance’: How Markets Dictate the Contextual Deviance of Parkour”. Available at <https://deviantleisure.wordpress.com/2014/07/21/re-thinking-parkour-as-resistance-how-markets-dictate-the-contextual-deviance-of-parkour/>

<sup>259</sup> Ibid. See the video at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=4&v=sdWAVPYZwDQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=sdWAVPYZwDQ)

<sup>260</sup> Angel, “Cine Parkour: A Cinematic and Theoretical Contribution to the Understanding of the

practitioners of PK Gaza. Another similar situation was also reported to me by Ahmad Matar, member of the Parkour group named PK Gaza in Palestine.<sup>261</sup> He said to me that the practice of Parkour in Palestine is banned from public space as they are often mistaken for thieves. Despite parkour, as described by Ahmad, playing an important role for this community of practitioners, allowing them to temporarily escape from the situation they daily face in Gaza, Ahmad reported that police often confiscate their cameras and charge them with fines.<sup>262</sup> Therefore they are forced to practice parkour in remote and hidden areas of Gaza City such as cemeteries, bombed and consequently abandoned buildings, or on the shore.

Thomas Raymen contends that parkour is suspended between celebration and criminalisation. When I emailed him, enquiring about his article and particularly the aspect of parkour as an illicit practice and therefore excluded from public space, his reply was: “[t]here are relatively few formal regulations ‘banning’ parkour, precisely because of its vague nature. How and when do you ascertain when someone is vaulting a barrier versus practicing parkour?” Angel apropos of this maintains that the perception that the general public may have of parkour could be one of “training cat burglars of the future, and how the mobility that parkour provides could be used for negative means.”<sup>263</sup> In popular culture this element was depicted in the 2015 movie *Tracer*<sup>264</sup>, where a group of

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Practice of Parkour”. p. 143

261 PK Gaza is a group of traceurs founded by Abdullah Anshasi and Mohammed Aljkhbayr, who started practising parkour in Gaza in 2005. The two practitioners had never had any formal training. Rather, they started practising parkour by watching videos on the internet and replicating professional traceurs' moves. The community since then has expanded, now comprising 50 members. Recently, they have also started a programme for training a new generation of parkour practitioners, which involves children aged between ten and fifteen years old. I met Ahmad through Skype meetings. The initial interview had to be divided into three (unfortunately, electricity is not reliable in Palestine so is it the internet connection). In particular I was interested in understanding the value of the discipline for parkour practitioners in Gaza. Additionally, the other interesting aspect I aimed to understand was related to their public perception while practicing.

262 The situation in Gaza is not easy and affects young people lives. Living in a place where high unemployment is a constant, particularly for younger people; most of Gaza's inhabitants rely on forms of support from the United Nations, and leaving Gaza is almost impossible, even for short periods. Practising parkour then becomes the vehicle through which this group of traceurs can metaphorically escape from that situation. Despite being forced to practice parkour on the ruins of bombed areas, on roofs of abandoned buildings and other abandoned areas of Gaza, as Ahmad quite vigorously said to me, they feel free and empowered.

263 Angel, “Cine Parkour: A Cinematic and Theoretical Contribution to the Understanding of the Practice of Parkour.” p. 143

264 Benmayor, *Tracers*.

traceurs is devoted to heisting and pursuing criminal activities. However, Matthew Lamb reports one of his interviewees – a parkour practitioner called Leapster – explaining that parkour's goal is not, nor could it be, total subversion. The episode reported by Lamb takes place near a museum guarded by a thick railing. Leapster then says:

*That thing is off limits to people, right? Or, I guess, people that didn't pay to get in, right. But how do we know that and why do we just not jump up there? So, like, parkour has really made me think about some of that stuff. Like, why don't I just go up there? What's stopping me? And doing parkour I could get up there easily, no problem, but that's not what [parkour] is about. It's just that I could now.*<sup>265</sup>

By contrast, Parkour is also spectacularised in movies, e.g. *Tracers*, *Casino Royale*, *District 13*, *Yamakasi*, etc., regulated by official bodies such as Parkour UK and performed at dedicated events. Angel asserts that “[t]hese have produced the parkour ‘performer’ and ‘athlete’, the bi-products of parkour’s move from an alternative practice to mainstream visibility.”<sup>266</sup> Raymen suggests that:

*[w]ithin these market-sanctioned spaces, traceurs are enabled and constructed as responsible, considerate, and protected risk-takers. However, when practised freely and imaginatively in the city in concurrence with its origins, traceurs become feckless, irresponsible, antisocial and inconsiderate risk-takers who disrupt and disturb others’ trying to enjoy the city in the proper (i.e. consumer) way.*<sup>267</sup>

### 7.2.1 Manipulating Scarcity: Creating Legitimacy by Intensifying Illegitimacy

In this respect, it is possible to argue that the market comes to dictate the social and spatial context in which an urban practice, i.e. parkour, is regarded as illicit or legitimate. This particular element entails the manipulation of the notion of scarcity, which recalls the element related to the different perception of the practice according to the context in which it is performed. Jeremy Till, Jon Goodbun, Michael Klein and Andreas Rumfhuber frame the term scarcity within

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265 Lamb, “Self and the City: Parkour, Architecture, and the Interstices of the ‘Knowable’ City”. p. 13

266 Angel, “Cine Parkour: A Cinematic and Theoretical Contribution to the Understanding of the Practice of Parkour”. p. 156

267 Raymen, “Re-Thinking Parkour as ‘Resistance’: How Markets Dictate the Contextual Deviance of Parkour”. Available at <https://deviantleisure.wordpress.com/2014/07/21/re-thinking-parkour-as-resistance-how-markets-dictate-the-contextual-deviance-of-parkour/>

the realm of economy. This derives from the Greek word *oikos* – the management of scarce resources. The scholars assert that scarcity should imply “a renewed engagement with some of the processes through which scarcity arises.”<sup>268</sup> However, the term *oikonimia*, framed within the idea of scarcity, concerns the aim of hegemonic apparatuses to replicate themselves and de-subjectivise individuals. It entails homologation over differentiation.<sup>269</sup>

In other words, to link the practice of parkour and scarcity it is possible to affirm that while practised in parkour gyms or parkour parks for instance, the practice is placed within a specific context. This context defines boundaries of time and space, official coaches act as invigilators and medical staff are on hand for injuries (for nominal fees, participants also have dedicated insurance). As outlined by Angel, when parkour is framed within such regulatory contexts “it changes the politics of the traceur from an active body exerting subtle resistance and participating in pragmatic anarchism to docility and passivity.”<sup>270</sup> The same reasoning is then replicated in the case of homelessness.

Hence, Chapter 4 reported one of my interviewee’s claim concerning the differing perception of people who are rough sleepers in Edinburgh. While working in a charitable service, the interviewee knew how to relate with homeless people attending the service. However, when outside in a public space, the perception of the same subject that was encountered at the charitable service was the opposite. The interviewee did not know how to relate to the homeless person, nor could s/he know what to do. In this respect this thesis agrees with Raymen as he comments with regard to the creation of parkour gyms and parks: “in creating these spaces of legitimacy, it [the market] intensifies and highlights its illegitimacy elsewhere.”<sup>271</sup> The issue at stake is precisely that: different ways of experiencing or exploring public space by certain social actors are not regarded as enriching the corollary of practices taking place in public space. Rather, they

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268 Jon Goodbun et al., *The Design of Scarcity*. p. 33

269 Agamben, “*What Is an Apparatus?*” and *Other Essays*.

270 Angel, “Cine Parkour: A Cinematic and Theoretical Contribution to the Understanding of the Practice of Parkour”. p. 172

271 Raymen, “Re-Thinking Parkour as ‘Resistance’: How Markets Dictate the Contextual Deviance of Parkour”. Available at <https://deviantleisure.wordpress.com/2014/07/21/re-thinking-parkour-as-resistance-how-markets-dictate-the-contextual-deviance-of-parkour/>

are regarded as a threat - as something alternative to a referenced practice that has to be homologated and controlled through the creation of specific spatial contexts.<sup>272</sup> In this respect, the praxis seems to be the one of filling the gap between deviance and legitimacy. However, this gap is precisely the centre that remains untroubled, as explained in Chapter 6. The idea of building a parkour park becomes instrumental to the perception of lack in the discipline, which requires a specific venue where practitioners are regarded as docile and responsible athletes. However, the parkour park is not capable of filling the gap between deviance and legitimacy. It rather emphasises the distance between these two opposite poles.

### **Il Papa saluta in Cappella Sistina 150 senz'atetto: questa è casa vostra**



Illustration 37: Image from one of the article describing Pope Francis' opening of the Sistine Chapel to homeless people. Image Source Reuters

The same occurs with projects involving homeless people that aim to increase social inclusion. To frame Raymen's account within the remit of this doctoral thesis, a series of examples can be given.

During my conference presentation at *Architecture of Alterity* in Edinburgh, I reported my account concerning Pope Francis' opening of the Sistine Chapel to homeless people in 2015. While at first I considered this event as an important step towards the acceptance of homeless people in public spaces, soon after I realised that actually Pope Francis' initiative was not so productive. It is possible to argue that the initiative framed the Pope as the only person capable of such

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<sup>272</sup> In this respect I agree with what asserted by Coyne, "[t]he city is after all made and remade through many perspectives. No doubt there are other perspectives yet to find expression, and yet to provide overt influence on the design of cities." See Coyne, "Re-Making the City".

charitable compassion towards the urban poor who orbit nearby St Peter's Square. I suggest that it would have been better if the initiative had also involved families and children. In this respect, my idea was that the Sistine Chapel could function as a mediating element that could problematise the gap between practices and behaviours that are alternative. Its architectural space would have established different social relations – everybody in that room would have been the same in front of Michelangelo's masterpiece; however, the sociocultural differences would have remained the same.

Another example was offered by the project designed by architect James Furzer. In that occasion, I found myself defending my position as researcher and designer concerning the different methodological attitudes between the project I have been running in Rome and a project for tiny little parasitic houses designed by the British architect. The discussion took place on #OpSafeWinter's Facebook page and concerned the project designed by Furzer concerning sleeping pods for the homeless.<sup>273</sup> Intuitively, what emerges from homelessness is that people sleeping rough on the street lack a permanent house (together with job and other commodities). However, the object of discussion with homelessness and architects is rather different. It is not so much whether homeless people lack anything, because they probably need everything, but whether architects and designers have understood the issue properly. This seems to be the case of a designer who can be described as a "rigid designator", as explained in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* by philosopher Žižek. The rigid designator misses a crucial point. S/he defines a general theory of referring functions, failing to provide a description of the effective features of an object.<sup>274</sup> The questions therefore would be: would the homeless person in St Peter's Square remain homeless even if housed? Would a designed tiny house specifically thought to accommodate homeless needs such as housing be really effective?<sup>275</sup> In other

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273 The project involves a modular pod that can hang off the side of an existing building. The homeless shelter's structure is metal and timber. For further details see: Mairs, "James Furzer to Crowdfund Parasitic Sleeping Pods for London's Homeless." The argument I raised concerned the speculative side of Furzer's project and the fact he was not really working with people who are homeless.

274 Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

275 In this respect, I would like to note that one of the most promising solutions to homelessness is called Housing First (Chapter 3). Housing First was initially developed in the United States in 1988. This programme, as presented in Chapter 3, offers permanent housing for individuals



words, as Till, Goodbun, Klein and Rumfhuber point out the danger inherent in dealing with scarcity may be:

*However much one wants to release scarcity from its economic hold, it still retains repressive and dominant connotations, and ones that obliterate a productive reading of desire.*<sup>276</sup>

### 7.3 Summary

This chapter has described how the practice of Parkour like the inhabitation of public space is suspended between deviance and legitimacy. In the conclusion of this chapter it is possible to delineate the underpinnings of this controversial feature. In the previous chapter, the issue at stake between alternative practices, which eventually become antagonist, was described in terms of a gap that, despite any attempt to fill it, remains untroubled.

In this chapter, the necessity of filling this gap, as the quote from Till, Goodbun, Klein and Rumfhuber reports, entails desire - the projection of one's own self into an unfamiliar other, i.e. a person who is homeless. It is possible to claim that what leaves the gap or centre between alternative practices untroubled is that filling this gap presumes that the attempt will solve the issue. By contrast, I agree with Till, Goodbun, Klein and Rumfhuber in that any such attempt should identify and tackle precisely the point where scarcity arises in the first instance. In other words, it is possible to claim that by unleashing or solving scarcity somewhere, i.e. by providing tiny little shelters to homeless people, one may release scarcity elsewhere, i.e. increasing social contrasts as it was with some of the people I discussed my thesis with asking me why homeless people would

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and families experiencing homelessness, and then provides the support services to avoid returning to homelessness. However, while presenting the project I am running in Rome (Chapter 6) to Rome City Council, the head of the department for Social Services asked me about the possibility of applying Housing First in Rome. I replied to her that in the specific context of Italy, where the welfare state is often contested, such a programme may end up emphasising social contrast. I reported in Chapter 3 how the public perception of a school turned into a homeless hostel was controversial. This is to say that this doctoral thesis is based on the conviction that an emancipatory step is necessary before activating programmes such as Housing First.

<sup>276</sup> Jon Goodbun et al., *The Design of Scarcity*. Please note the use of the word desire. This was already discussed in Chapter 4 as the difference between perceiving homeless people's presence in the Convent and on the street by Ruggiero. See p. 41

deserve to be housed more than people who work but cannot afford to buy a home.

In the next chapter, this work of research will culminate in a physical intervention into public space. Although it may sound perilous, this intervention is an attempt that aims at inspiring possible new modalities of doing architecture. The project that will be presented in the next chapter aims to question inclusivity, homelessness and public space through direct responsabilisation of the involved subjects.



## **8 A Public Intervention into Public Space: Tait and St Peter's Square**

Chapter 8 aims to describe the project I have been running in Rome with the communities of people who are rough sleepers in St Peter's Square and named *tAIt*. As anticipated in the development of the previous chapters, the object I designed is precarious and attempts to answer the research questions advanced throughout this thesis: how can architectural practice and theory re-imagine the centre ground between alternative practices in space? Can design problematise the centre between alternative practices in space? By intending the centre as precarious, is it through an understatement of precarity that it is possible to find a way of problematising the centre?

The description of *tAIt* begins with an account based on marginality and provotyping. This last term was introduced in Chapter 2 to describe objects that may serve the purpose of manufacturing constructive tensions and relationships among the involved stakeholders. Provotyping will be combined with other sources that have informed the development of this precarious object.

Hence, *tAIt* attempts to tackle and explore three main aspects that were developed in this thesis. The first is scarcity. In this respect the aim of the object is to question the point at which scarcity arises, i.e. within the point of view of architectural studies, this thesis defends the hypothesis that the question at the core of social inclusivity is not whether to house individuals who are homeless. Rather, *it is* how to deal with their presence in public space and whether this presence effectively contributes to the construction of it. In this respect, one of the aspects that was taken into account is the effort that the community of homeless individuals in St Peter's Square put to keep that space clean. As examined in Chapter 3, the main difficulty encountered is that the series of tactics deployed by homeless individuals are not regarded as contributions. In other words, the effort put to maintain the portico as clean and in some respect open and accessible by everyone in the day time does not affect their social status. To intervene where scarcity arises was therefore intended as a way to make homeless people's contributions visible and acknowledgeable by the rest of the social actors who pass through the porticoes.

The second aspect that tAIIt aims to unveil is the possible encounter with an unfamiliar other. In Chapter 4, the possibility of establishing familiar forms of relationships between housed and unhoused individuals was described as depending on the context in which the encounters take place. While inside contexts related to charitable services, the presence of established roles contributes to the construction of relationships between the range of social actors involved, i.e. both housed and unhoused individuals. When people who are homeless are encountered on the street, the same process is vanished. Encountering an unfamiliar other in public space is akin to a process that involves the projection of desire of one subject over the other. Intuitively, it is the housed subject who, by projecting his/her personal insights into the person who is homeless, determines what the former is lacking. By exploiting tAIIt's materiality, it was possible to conceive a precarious object that aims to manufacture a form of remote dialogue among the range of potentially involved stakeholders. This entails questioning the notion of ecology of involved individuals, reworking the concept of feedback and feedforward - tAIIt is a fragile object demanding each user take care of it. In this respect the object makes explicit the condition whether users' actions and behaviours when using the object may harm the system or not.

The third aspect explored through tAIIt concerns mediation. In chapter 4, while describing the protest that took place in Nottingham, I anticipated the presence of a parasitic cascade. In other words, throughout the series of passages that involved the whole protest action, people who were involved who were homeless ended up being passive subjects who relied on the provision of services coming from external sources. In other words, the example was useful to show the inadequacy of certain actions in that they do not prompt any empowering and self-emancipative process. In this respect, the project I developed aims at proposing a different and new interpretation of the concept of mediation: one that works with the concept developed by the philosopher Agamben, who frames mediation within the use of the Greek word *chresthai*, which stands for utilisation.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Agamben, *L'uso Dei Corpi. Homo Sacer*, IV, 2.

## 8.1 TΛIT: Between Provotyping and Marginality

tΛIt is a provotype. This type of methodological approach was illustrated in Chapter 2. In particular, according to De Boer and Donovan, provotypes “expose and embody tensions that surround a field of interest to support collaborative analysis and collaborative design explorations across stakeholders.”<sup>278</sup> The reader should be now aware that the range of stakeholders involved in the project is heterogeneous. It comprises rough sleepers, passers-by, charitable bodies, institutional bodies, i.e. Rome City Council and to an extent also the Vatican City, activists and people who are involved in charitable bodies. This heterogeneous range of stakeholders required a collection of qualitative data that was multi-perspective. Consequently, this aspect informed the project and its rationale. De Boer and Donovan's definition underlies an important aspect concerning provotyping. They embody and expose tensions within a constrained field of interest. In this respect, the field of interest is the one expressed by one of the two research questions: by intending the centre as precarious, is it through an understatement of precarity that it is possible to find a way of problematising the centre? The attempt here is to show how the design of a precarious object can answer the research question. In order to analyse this, the section will unpack the various components inherent in provotyping as suggested by De Boer and Donovan, linking these with aspects concerning the notion of marginality, feedback and feedforward and scarcity.

The object I designed aims to function as a boundary object, stressing the notion of boundary itself. In the paper *Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology* sociologists Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer contend that boundary objects “have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation.”<sup>279</sup> In this respect, boundary objects are investigational tools aimed at maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds. The aspect of being a boundary object resonates with precarity. In particular in

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278 De Boer, Laurens and Donovan, Jared, “Provotypes for Participatory Innovation.” p. 388

279 Star and Griesemer, “Institutional Ecology, translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39.” p. 393

Chapter 4 it was argued how certain identities and consequently practices remain on the threshold of public space while Chapter 5 unveiled how it is within precarity that identities are able to find ways for a definition of the self. Consequently, these identities make themselves knowable in space. In this respect, <sup>280</sup>It is an object that works upon the concept of precarity, challenging the notion of marginality and boundary as proposed by Star and Griesemer. The two scholars point out that marginality refers to subjects who have membership in more than one social world. However marginality also implies that subjects through their behaviours and practices may be volatile, elusive and confusing.<sup>280</sup> They may pass on one side or another, deny one side, form a new social world or oscillate between worlds. These conditions are somehow all descriptive of the portico area in St Peter's Square.

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid.





Illustration 38: People sleeping rough in the portico in St Peter's Square

## 8.2 tIt as a Mediating Device: Raising Awareness of the Effort through Feedback and Feedforward

As invoked in Chapter 4 and unveiled in Chapter 5, public space would require a mediating device capable of transforming boundaries into possibilities of encounters. One of the aspects upon which tIt invites individuals to reflect is precisely the contingency of uses, presence and practices in space. In this respect tIt may be said to function as a reminder, a sort of public ledger that reminds individuals of the traces of its use and the use of space by other practices. In other words, the object does not only aim to raise awareness of the presence of homeless people in public space, challenging the notion of public as it was with Transgressive Architecture's *Bed Sheet Project*<sup>281</sup> (Chapter 3). Rather, one of tIt's aims is to raise awareness of the effort of maintaining the space of the portico kept clean by the community of people who are homeless, intending this as a claim of homeless people's autonomy and dignity. This has implied examining two aspects concerning design: feedback and feedforward.

Interaction designers and scholars Jo Vermeulen, Kris Luyten, Elise van den Hoven, and Karin Coninx in the paper *Crossing the Bridge over Norman's Gulf of Execution: Revealing Feedforward's True Identity* describe how feedback and feedforward function in relation to the use of an object by users. The first "is provided during or after a user's action and informs them about the result of performing their action" while feedforward "occurs before the user's action and tells users what the result of their action will be."<sup>282</sup> However, feedback and feedforward can be also intended in terms of performativity.

It has already been discussed above how performativity can be intended as a promise, which is maintained through the action performed, e.g. a stair promises

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281 Doron, M. Gil, "Transgressive Architecture – Testing the Boundaries of Inclusiveness."

282 Vermeulen et al., "Crossing the Bridge over Norman's Gulf of Execution: Revealing Feedforward's True Identity." p. 1938 On the subject of interaction design the account provided by Rex Hartson on cognitive affordances was of particular interest. The scholar defines cognitive affordances as: "A cognitive affordance is a design feature that helps, aids, supports, facilitates, or enables thinking and/or knowing about something." See: Hartson, "Cognitive, Physical, Sensory, and Functional Affordances in Interaction Design." On the subject of day-to-day interaction see: Summers-Effler, Van Ness, and Hausmann, "Peeking in the Black Box Studying, Theorizing, and Representing the Micro-Foundations of Day-to-Day Interactions."

individuals that it will lead them to an upper or a lower floor. In this respect it is possible to examine the notion of feedback and feedforward and their implications through the analysis of two projects that have been inspirational for tΛIt: *Body Movies – Relational Architecture 6* by Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and *Natural Fuse* by architect and interactive designer Usman Haque.

### 8.2.1 Body Movies – Relational Architecture 6

Chapter 3 presented de Waal's studies concerning the construction of public space and the role design can play. In particular, his work envisions two contrasting possibilities. One, found in *The Libertarian City*, is mostly based on individualism. This as de Waal points out “functions as a market [and] offers a great deal of freedom, but that freedom is also so free of commitment that it can ultimately lead to far-reaching fragmentation and segregation, both culturally and economically.”<sup>283</sup> By contrast, de Waal also presents the city as a communitarian society. In this case public space is based on “an unambiguous shared culture, [which] is too coercive and offers little individual freedom.”<sup>284</sup> The possible third concept of city envisioned by de Waal is the Republican City. This is an intermediate position between the two discussed above, which works according to a variable notion of public. Public is at the same time intended by de Waal as a group of people sharing a common space as much as individuals who make themselves public. In so doing individuals make themselves knowable in space.<sup>285</sup> In order to highlight a possible architectural intervention that describes ideals of the republican city, de Waal illustrates the project realised by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and titled *Body Movies – Relational Architecture 6*.

*Body Movies – Relational Architecture 6* was a video installation realised in 2001 in Rotterdam, which involved two factors: one, it projected gigantic slides of people onto the sidewall of a cinema, and two, it combined these images with shadow play. Passers-by were invited to expose their shadows with the projected photographs on the wall. Hence, the video installation included a camera with image-recognition software, which analysed the movements of passers-by

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<sup>283</sup> de Waal, *The City as Interface: How Digital Media Are Changing the City*. p. 9

<sup>284</sup> Ibid. p. 10

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.



walking in front of the video installation. Once the position assumed by a passer-by matched with the one projected on the wall, the software produced a new image that combined both the photograph and the shadow of the passer-by.<sup>286</sup> In other words, the video installation “encouraged people to work together with the aim of together assuming exactly that one position in front of the [camera] that matched the composition on the cinema wall.”<sup>287</sup> As noted in the first chapter, de Waal is concerned *with* the role that digital design may play in shaping and constructing public space. Although Lozano-Hemmer's project involves the use of digital contents, his project was influential in the development of tAIIt not so much for the tool it involves, but rather for the theoretical underpinning *Body Movies* expresses.



Illustration 39: Body Movies - Relational Architecture 6. Image courtesy CTheory.net

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286 Ekman, “Of the Untouchability of Embodiment I: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s Relational Architectures.”

287 de Waal, *The City as Interface: How Digital Media Are Changing the City*. p. 164

### 8.2.2 The Use of Feedforward in Lozano-Hemmer's Installation

Lozano-Hemmer's installation cannot be considered as an intervention based on the principles of interaction design discussed above - feedback and feedforward. As de Waal suggests, Body Movies "refers to 'relational architecture' rather than interactivity."<sup>288</sup> Interactivity can be referred to a reaction: the user acts on an object and receives feedback, e.g. the stair leads to an upper or lower floor. Relational architecture involves a multiplicity of relationships within a collective of strangers. De Waal asserts that with Body Movies "the existing protocol - strangers do not disturb each other in public space - is thus disrupted."<sup>289</sup> This aspect was discussed in Chapter 3 through the analysis of philosopher Žižek's definition of tolerance in relation to private and public sphere.<sup>290</sup> In this respect, as suggested by de Waal, the project blurs sociocultural boundaries present in public space, functioning as an interactive medium.

It is possible to frame what argued above within the arguments and descriptions made of the role played by Christ in Michelangelo's *The Last Judgement* examined in Chapter 6. Hence, Christ in the painting is the only active subject. He is surrounded by a vortex of heterogeneous characters where the role and identity of those who have to be sent to Hell or Heaven are not defined nor identifiable. However, they contribute to the construction of the painting's narrative. The painting in fact describes the precarious condition determined by the fact that it is Christ who is in charge to decide the destiny of the people in the vortex. In other words, as in Lozano-Hemmer's installation the shadow of the participants is projected only when passers-by's positions match with the images projected onto the cinema wall; in Michelangelo's painting the destiny of those who will be sent to Heaven or Hell depends on whether their behaviour in life matches or not with certain criteria established by Christ. This suggests an important aspect related to feedback and feedforward. The concept expressed by *Body Movies* in terms of relational architecture does not deny the presence of feedback inherent in user's (re)actions. Rather, it doubles the presence of feedback, transforming this into feedforward- people who were involved in Lozano-Hemmer's installation

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid. p. 163

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Žižek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category."

were made aware of the fact that the system could function only if everybody was willing to cooperate.

### 8.2.3 Feedback and Feedforward

The benefit of using feedforward concerns an idea of awareness. According to Vermeulen, Luyten, van den Hoven, and Coninx while feedback helps users understand the state of a system, feedforward “[marks] the difference between the user’s intentions and the allowable actions – by helping users decide what action to take based on that action’s expected outcome.”<sup>291</sup> To frame this reasoning in provotyping, as De Boer and Donovan assert, “[b]y taking a critical stance and deliberately grounding provotypes in the tensions between an organization and a field of interest, provotypes potentially catalyze the process of the organization in becoming more user-centered by challenging organizations’ perceptions.”<sup>292</sup> Recalling Lozano-Hemmer's Body Movies, it is possible to see how this intervention challenges organisations' perception. The installation implies the presence of a system that functions in terms of an ecology: if people cooperate together, then their actions will contribute to construct a new image on the cinema wall. This seems to suggest the possibility that provotypes in their appropriation by a collective of individuals may highlight an ecology that includes both individuals and related values, i.e. cultural, social, economic, political inherent in the relationship that the project may manufacture. The presence of a system in terms of an ecology and its implication has been made more explicit in the other project I examined: *Natural Fuse* by Usman Haque.

### 8.2.4 Natural Fuse: Highlighting Scarcity and Ecology

Natural Fuse makes use of the carbon-sinking capacity of plants and creates a network of devices that work both as electricity stores and as a shared resource that balances the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the production of that electricity. Hence, *Natural Fuse* allows only a defined amount of energy to be expended, depending on CO<sub>2</sub> stored by the plants in the system. These plants are networked together

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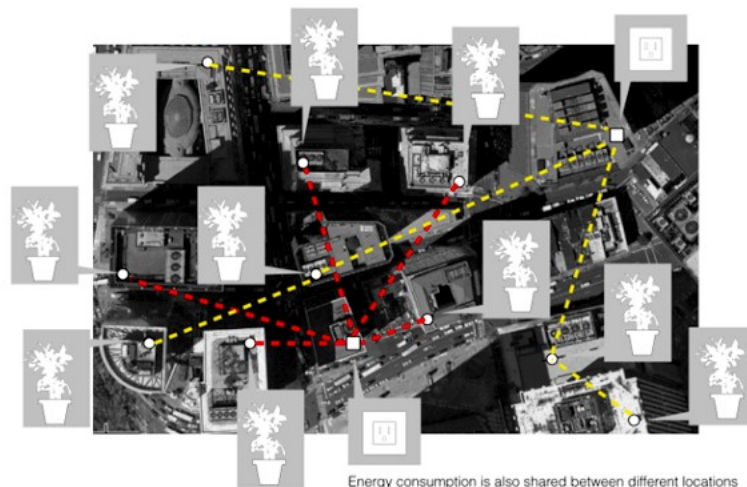
<sup>291</sup> Vermeulen et al., “Crossing the Bridge over Norman’s Gulf of Execution: Revealing Feedforward’s True Identity.” p. 1932

<sup>292</sup> De Boer, Laurens and Donovan, Jared, “Provotypes for Participatory Innovation.” p. 390

and create a carbon-sinking surplus since not all the devices are used at the same time. The project therefore relies on people's cooperation, being built upon the prisoner's dilemma.<sup>293</sup>



Illustration 40: Natural Fuse. Image courtesy haque.co.uk



NATURAL FUSE : networking units

Illustration 41: Natural Fuse networking units. Image courtesy haque.co.uk

Energy consumption is also shared between different locations so if one person has more plants, then that allows someone else to use more electricity. However, if anyone starts to use too much electricity then both their own plant AND SOMEONE ELSE'S will break the circuit (i.e. the plants will be killed).

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293 Shepard, *Sentient City: Ubiquitous Computing, Architecture, and the Future of Urban Space*.

As described in Haque's website:

*Rather than just having an "on/off" switch for your appliance, you are provided with a "selfless/selfish" switch. If you choose "selfless" then the unit will provide only enough power that won't harm the community's carbon footprint. But, if the carbon sequestering capacity of the community is currently low, the electricity may switch off after a few seconds - though it could be on long enough for what you need to do. If on the other hand you absolutely must have electricity (e.g. you hear an intruder in your apartment and you \*must\* switch on your light at full power) then you might want to choose "selfish" - which will give you as much power as your appliance needs. BUT, if you harm the community's carbon footprint (i.e. it goes from negative to positive) then the Natural Fuse system will KILL SOMEBODY ELSE'S PLANT!<sup>294</sup>*

The project invites participants to reflect upon their decisions and potential consequences. In this respect it is possible to argue that the notion of feedback turned into feedforward is applied in the selfless/selfish switch so that people are aware that their choice to be either selfish or selfless may harm the network. In other words, the system, i.e. production of electricity and the network of involved participants, had been made scarce. In so doing, Haque managed to define a constraint that highlights the value of ecology around the actors involved and their actions. Jon Goodbun, Michael Klein, Andreas Rumpfhuber and Jeremy Till write that "[m]atter, when viewed ecologically, is much more than fixed lumps of stuff; it is "vibrant", and the world is encountered as bodies mutually affecting each other."<sup>295</sup> Framing scarcity within an ecological system, as they suggest, implies not only stopping resources from running out but rather engaging with some of the processes through which scarcity arises. In this respect, a reversed example of ecology was already discussed in Chapter 6 and 7. The main issue at stake with scarcity is that any attempt to solve it may release scarcity elsewhere, i.e. turning an abandoned elementary school into a hostel for homeless people in Rome caused complaints by legitimate taxpayers who denounced the way public money had been spent (Chapter 1, 3 and 7). They claimed that this could be used to provide taxpayers' children's schools with services that are actually lacking.

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<sup>294</sup> In this respect, the main difference between Haque's Natural Fuse and *tat* lies in costs. While Natural Fuse involves costs concerning its production, *tat* may be produced with a relatively small budget. It is entirely made out of recycled cardboard collected at shops (free). The only expenses concern glue and cutting accessories.

<sup>295</sup> Jon Goodbun et al., *The Design of Scarcity*. p. 33





Illustration 42: Selfless/selfish button. Image courtesy haque.co.uk

The idea I attempted to pursue was not simply to blur boundaries, by making the effort of the community of homeless people in cleaning up the space visible. Rather, the object attempts to manufacture an ecology of effort. This is expressed by involved actors through their actions and use of *tAt*. However, to manufacture this ecology implied to creatively rework and play with *tAt*'s main constraints: its presence in space and its materiality.

#### **8.2.5 *tAt* and the Use of Feedback turned into Feedforward: Reworking *tAt*'s Presence And Materiality**

The use of feedback which is turned into feedforward entails that the object is provided with a relevant set of explicit and implicit information. The first is aimed at making passers-by aware of the fact that the presence of the object in the portico area is part of a sociocultural and architectural experiment. In this respect the information is in the form of written text (in Italian and English), which should be placed on the object. The text explains to users how the object functions and that people are using *tAt* because of the community of people who

are rough sleepers underneath the portico who have taken care of it overnight. A second set of information is aimed at providing handles<sup>296</sup> for people's exploration of the community of rough sleepers in St Peter's Square. As asserted by De Boer and Donovan, "[p]rovotypes should support people to follow their curiosity about a provotype (or the phenomena it addresses) through their engagement with it."<sup>297</sup> The idea therefore has been to provide tIt with a relevant set of digital contents. By scanning QR codes, passers-by for instance may have access to pictures that describe the situation below the portico and the fact that the community of people who are rough sleepers maintain the space as clean and tidy. The aim therefore is to stimulate participation in the collective, intending that each "group's" different practices are not in contrast. Instead they run in parallel. They do not remain indifferent to one another but instead become open to the possibility of establishing encounters.

Chapter 2 and 3 described how the portico area is cleaned up by the community of homeless inhabitants every morning. Chapter 3 also revealed how dialectical relationships within the remit of homelessness and public space underlie a component of hegemony by one of the involved social spheres.<sup>298</sup> The act of cleaning and tidying up the space was described as a survival tactic aimed at granting the right of access and permanence underneath the portico. However, it is possible to frame this within activities related to agonism. Hence, this practice can be intended as a modality through which the situation of the portico is normalised during the day for those passers-by who walk through the portico area. In fact, from the observations I carried out, passers-by unwittingly ignore the effective reality at stake in that space. Passers-by interviewed considered only the most visible aspect, i.e. homeless people sleeping rough but were unaware that these individuals cleaned up the space every day. Additionally, it could be pointed out how, as described in Chapter 3 through the account of Gil Doron, certain practices, i.e. rough sleeping could or rather should be regarded as *critically active*.<sup>299</sup> In this respect, the attempt has been to turn a relationship with

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296 Boer, Donovan, and Buur, "Challenging Industry Conceptions with Provotypes." The aspect with handles can also be intended with what Donald Norman has defined with the term affordances. See Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things / Donald A. Norman*.

297 Boer, Donovan, and Buur, "Challenging Industry Conceptions with Provotypes." p. 396

298 Žižek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category."

299 Doron, "The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression."

the other, i.e. rough sleepers and passers-by as hegemonic into an array of relationships that could be agonistic.

*Agon*, from the Greek word for agonism, pairs conversely with *alea*. The first implies merit while the second refers to heredity, that is, as argued by scholar in economy Loek Groot, chance.<sup>300</sup> Groot, by analysing Roger Caillois' *Men, Play, Games contends* that the two words when applied to games present a twofold similarity and a twofold complementarity. In particular in both regulated (*agon*) and chance (*alea*) games, players have *a n* equal opportunity to win. That is, players start from a common ground of equal possibility to win. In terms of complementarity between the two terms, *agon* implies that the winner has taken more effort, perhaps *exhibited* more skill than the loser while *alea* implies that the player in chance games relies purely on luck. In agonistic games the winner is defined, according to Caillois, "in such a way that the winner appears to be better than the loser in a certain category of exploits."<sup>301</sup> Conversely, *alea* implies, as Groot writes, *that* "the winners are assigned by lot."<sup>302</sup> In this respect, it could be argued that in the portico area nearby St Peter's Square, the community of homeless people relies on chance in terms of subsistence offered by the passer-by. This as *concluded* in Chapter 3 can be counterproductive. It implies two aspects related to dissociative practices: one, an incapability of passers-by to cope and relate with homeless people. Two, it implies that the only form of dialogue between homeless people and passers-by is in form of merciful donation of money. However, it is possible to suppose that the chance to receive money from passers-by may be augmented by the fact that that passers-by are aware that for instance the portico is cleaned up during the day by the homeless people. This practice, as argued before, is a survival tactic aimed at manufacturing a sense of tolerance amongst passers-by and public authorities. Hence, the effort of tidying up the Portico area may be also framed within agonism. In this respect the tidying up of the portico area is in the vein of defining a neutral and cleaned up space. It can be seen as a practice aimed to present the portico as a common ground of equality: open to appropriation by a collective composed of the two

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300 Groot, "Roger Caillois, Games of Chance and the Superstar." p. 3

301 Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*. Contained in Groot, "Roger Caillois, Games of Chance and the Superstar."

302 Groot, "Roger Caillois, Games of Chance and the Superstar." p . 3

micro-worlds outlined in Chapter 2, passers-by and the people who are homeless.

### 8.3 Right to be Citizens and Access to Public Space

Inheritance related to *alea* also involved a blog post I wrote on the 4 of August 2015 concerning the issue with rubbish on street that involved Rome at that time and the right to citizenship. Hence, as reported by international and national newspapers<sup>303</sup>, Rome was suffering a major issue with the collection of rubbish from the streets. This had worsened in 2015, reaching critical levels. Journalist Gaia Pianigiani, Italy correspondents for The New York Times used the expression “the decay of Rome” to express the situation that Rome and its denizens were experiencing.<sup>304</sup> In response to that situation a famous Italian actor, roman denizen himself Alessandro Gassmann promoted an initiative through the social network Twitter called #Romasonoio (literally I am Rome). The actor twitted a picture of himself cleaning up the street in Rome, inviting other citizens to do the same.<sup>305</sup> However, this initiative was controversial and although embraced by many people was contested by Roman dwellers. Their complaints concerned the fact that people who pay taxes for the collection of rubbish would deserve to have that service and not to provide it by themselves.<sup>306</sup>

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303 Balmer, “Its Glory Faded, Decaying Modern Rome ‘Needs a Miracle.’”

304 Pianigiani, “Times Article on Rome’s Decay Draws a Surge of New Scrutiny.”

305 Kirchgaessner, “Actor’s Call for Colossal Cleanup Inspires Roman Citizens to Roll up Sleeves.” In this respect, in the blog post titled “Using Twitter as a Collective Mood” Ring, Jenna Wortham outlines how Twitter can be used to call people to act. See: Wortham, “Using Twitter as a Collective Mood Ring.”

306 “‘Roma sono io’, i romani rispondono all’appello di Alessandro Gassmann. Ma c’è anche chi lo critica.”



**Alessandro Gassmann** ✓  
@GassmanGassmann

Segui

Proposta ai Romani che amano la propria città #Romasonoio

23:42 - 25 Lug 2015

↩ ↺ 1.334 ❤ 1.208

Illustration 43: The Tweet by Roman actor Alessandro Gassmann

I was just arrived in Rome from Edinburgh to spend my summer holidays and the impression I could get was that of a dirty city. Rome was in a state of abandonment. It had been abandoned not so much by institutional bodies, the issue with rubbish collection from street in fact involved a political and judicial case involving members of Rome City Council.<sup>307</sup> However, Rome had also been abandoned by its city-dwellers. Roman denizens were concerned with complaining against the City Council, but most of them refused to get involved in an initiative that in my opinion could have been empowering for the citizens. By contrast, while visiting the community of homeless people in St Peter's Square I encountered Dario, one of the occupants. I noticed that he and a friend of his were using the can of a famous crisps brand as an ashtray. Until that moment, I knew that the community was devoted to cleaning up the portico in the morning. However, I was not aware of the fact they would keep the space clean throughout the day.

The blog post I wrote questioned the importance of that small gesture that, framed in the situation that Rome was experiencing, remained invisible. It questioned the meaning of citizenship and who has the right to call him/herself a Roman citizen. Citizenship in fact is something an individual inherits from his/her parents. However, having a citizenship should also involve civic duties. As sustained by David Harvey, the city and its public space are the reflection of what type of people city-dwellers want to be. Hence, the question with any right to the city concerns not simply how the city functions but also how its inhabitants are and aim to be. By only complaining against the City Council, Roman

<sup>307</sup> Pianigiani, "Romans Put Little Faith in Mayor as Their Ancient City Degrades."

denizens were denying the right to the city, which is a right to enjoy and access to Rome and its public spaces. Ultimately, the aim of that blog post was to denounce the easiness with which people define themselves citizens, which is only due to inheritance. By contrast, it pointed to highlight the work of a community of people who do not have the right to have a citizenship and experience indifference and exclusion but that were effectively contributing to make a portion of public space enjoyable and accessible for the collective.

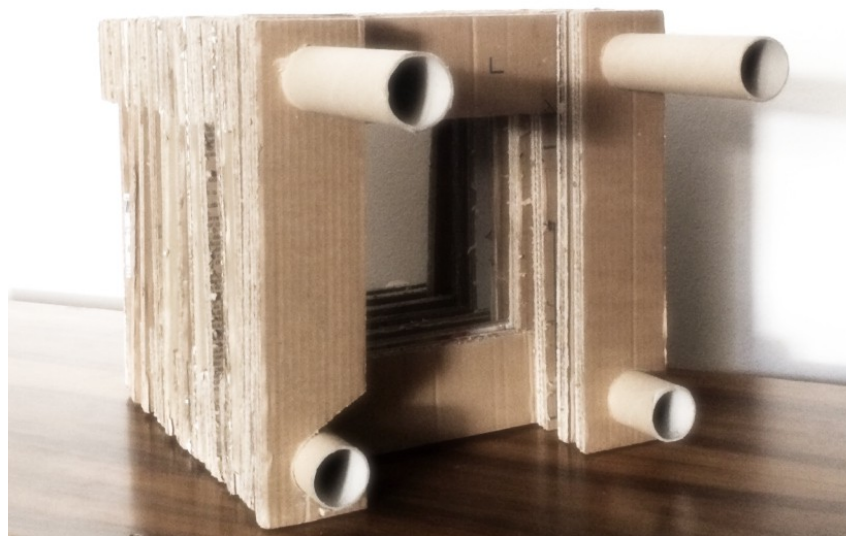


Illustration 44: The second provotype realised

This suggests that a component is missed in order to present this endeavour and aimed at turning the Portico area from being a conflictual space into a space of encounter as part of a constructive and agonistic game. Something needs to be provided “on the ground”, both literally and metaphorically that may channel this effort and turn sociocultural boundaries into possibilities of encounters; that is, something that visualises the sleeping rough and consequently tidying up of the space as being a critically active practice and therefore stimulates processes of interaction among these social components.<sup>308</sup> In this respect tIt attempts to be

<sup>308</sup> In this respect it is interesting the account provided by Richard Coyne in the blog article “Interactive Architecture” see: <http://richardcoyne.com/2015/04/26/interactive-architecture/>. Particularly Coyne combines the notion of game and agon with the one of interactive

as outlined by De Boer and Donovan “intrusive and estrange to challenge perceptions and stimulate ongoing reflection, but should also be inconspicuous and embraced in order to be domesticated and not be rejected.”<sup>309</sup>

### 8.3.1 Working with tAt's Constraints: Bad Smell and the Construction of Dialectical Property Rights

One of the first concerns I dealt with was the argument regarding a possible rejection. The object is made out of recycled cardboard. The decision to use this material was not only motivated by the fact that this is mostly used by homeless people to sleep rough. Rather, it was based upon the idea of making tAt a fragile object. If on the one hand by using cardboard I was able to design precarity through its materiality, then on the other hand, this stresses tAt's materiality to overcome the aspect concerning the possible rejection of the object: the fact that homeless people by using the object may cause other people, i.e. passers-by to refuse to use it during day. In particular, when presenting the project to interviewees they pointed out how tAt may be instead repulsive if for instance they perceive that the object is dirty due to its use by homeless people.<sup>310</sup> As some of the interviewees pointed out:<sup>311</sup>

*Antonella: Well, you know... It's made out of cardboard, so it may smell if a homeless person has slept on it. I don't know, you can't wash it.*

*Marco: If I knew the object was used by homeless people then I would not use it. I have the idea it is dirty.*

*Giovanni: No, I don't think I will use it. They [homeless people] are dirty and smell badly.*

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architecture. A further exploration of the notion of interactive architecture and agonism, although in a very premature fashion was already some how addressed by myself in the article Gesuelli Fabrizio, Chiara Andreotti. The Urban Backdoor: Replacing the Meaning of Mediator in Architectural Public Space. Int|AR Journal: Intervention + Adaptive Reuse, Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Volume 05: Resilience and Adaptability – ISBN 978-3-03821-606-3.

309 Boer, Donovan, and Buur, “Challenging Industry Conceptions with Provotypes.”. p. 396

310 In this respect I added to components to the mixture of glue and water to glue tAt's pieces: wax and allume. The first is to increase cardboard's resistance to water while allume, a mineral with anti-bacterial properties to sanitise the cardboard.

311 These transcripts are from two different focus groups had with people who were both involved in charitable works and not. In particular a description of the interview rationale is provided in Chapter 3 and 4.

Philosopher Slavoj Žižek argues regarding smell that the latter is one of the components that defines the relationship with the other in terms of intolerance. He points out that “[f]or the middle class, lower classes smell; their members do not wash regularly.”<sup>312</sup> Specifically, there is an overgeneralised perception of the other, i.e. the rough sleeper as a subject who smells badly and therefore the smell may occur to form a barrier in terms of tolerance and use of the object. The argument regarding smell as a repulsive boundary then does not apply to homeless people alone but aims to involve passers-by. Hence the object could be regarded as personal rather than public. In “*Stercoral Origins of Property Rights*”, a chapter included in *The Parasite*, Michel Serres explores the argument regarding the creation of property, outlining how this can be intended as a boundary. The notion of property functions as a barrier that cannot be overcome by individuals other than the owner. In the development of his argument, Serres utilises the example of the rubbish bin as a possible ultimate object owner. When objects are thrown away and put into rubbish bins, they are mixed with the other elements inside and start smelling badly. In other words, Serres asserts, the objects inside start possessing a sort of aura which prevents others from taking these objects back.

### 8.3.2 Moving Dialectical Property Rights into Agonistic Sharing: The Effort of Homeless People

However, the issue with smell and personal hygiene can be moved from this dialectical relationship that manufactures a contrast between rough sleepers and passers-by into an agonistic relationship. It was observed above that tΔIt adopts a series of digital contents, which will be embedded in the object and accessible through QR codes. It otherwise provides handles<sup>313</sup> for people's exploration of the community of rough sleepers in St Peter's Square and the services that have been provided to them by Pope Francis. Nearby St Peter's colonnade a washroom service for the community of rough sleepers was recently opened. It offers services such as shower, barber and toilet. In this respect, the idea of service as

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<sup>312</sup> Žižek, “Tolerance as an Ideological Category.” p. 13

<sup>313</sup> Boer, Donovan, and Buur, “Challenging Industry Conceptions with Provotypes.” The aspect with handles can also be intended with what Donald Norman has defined with the term affordances. See Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things* / Donald A. Norman.



something that is provided as a means of ideological desire expressed by a dominant class, as was the proposal of using abandoned military bases to shelter homeless people (Chapter 3), is addressed in a different fashion. Personal hygiene is not simply a service; rather it becomes empowering for the rough sleeper. It becomes part of the effort in making *tΛIt* a shared object between the two micro-worlds. Washing up during the day is therefore not in a dialectal relationship but it becomes part of a shared set of rules that are part of the game of sharing *tΛIt*. It is what contributes to make *tΛIt* be both a personal and a public object.

### 8.3.3 An Exercise of Effort for the General Public

The notion of effort is not only referred to as an agonistic activity on the side of rough sleepers and aimed at preventing repulsiveness. Rather, effort is also required on the side of passers-by. This is expressed through a series of different digital contents that aim at engaging with passers-by. These contents call individuals to be part of a network of people involved in the project. There is a series of advertisements<sup>314</sup> that invites individuals to advertise the project through digital channels such as social networks or blog pages. These invite individuals to reflect upon several elements concerning the project, including *tΛIt*'s instructions. The project is open source: I do not own any copyright; rather I have created a two-page instruction that explains how to re-make the object. The two advertisements created so far invite individuals to reflect upon elements directly related to the object and the issue it attempts to problematise. *Be The Hand* reflects upon the element of creation and property illustrated above through Serres' account. It suggests how effectively recycling cardboard, a material meant to be wasted, when turned into an object with new functionalities can be effectively deemed as a way of creating value by an individual. *Recycle Responsibly* is more provocative for it reflects on the production of human and social waste by contemporary capitalistic economical drives. The latter was

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<sup>314</sup> The idea of advertisement was already discussed in Chapter 4 and 5 as inspired by Bernard Tschumi's Advertisements for Architecture. Notably, the idea was discussed with Tschumi personally, during the interview I had with him last October 2014 in Paris as part of my research investigation. I was pointing out to him that "there is nothing very much to advertise about architecture, rather it is time to (h)acknowledge!". See Tschumi, *Architecture Concepts : Red Is Not a Color / Bernard Tschumi*.

inspired by a speech led by Pope Francis in the occasion of the presentation of the 2015 Expo in Milan<sup>315</sup> that was later included in his last encyclical *Laudato Si*.<sup>316</sup>

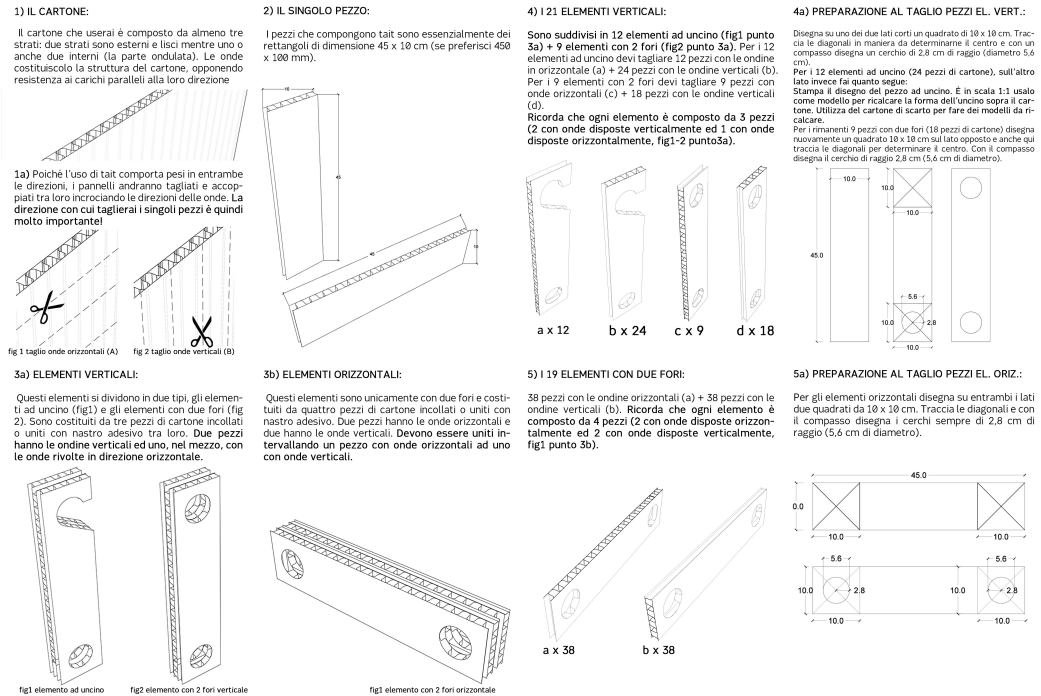


Illustration 45: Instructions to re-make the object

315 See Pope Francis' speech at: [http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/02/28/pope\\_urges\\_co-ops\\_to\\_promote\\_economy\\_of\\_honesty/1126264](http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/02/28/pope_urges_co-ops_to_promote_economy_of_honesty/1126264)

316 Catholic Church. Pope (2013 : Francis)., *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis, on Care for Our Common Home*. In the encyclical the Pope addresses the notion of production of social waste and exclusion of the other. In a passage, the Pope writes that we are witness of "a throwaway culture which affects the excluded [i.e. the homeless person] just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish."

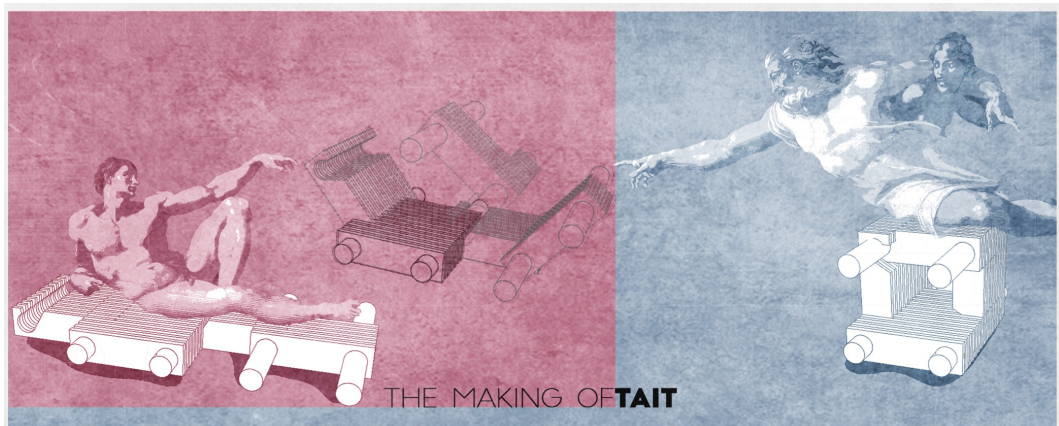


Illustration 46: Be the Hand



Illustration 47: Recycle Responsibly

#### 8.4 Problematising the Multifold Way in which the Space of the Portico is Used: *tat* as a Technological Probe

Finally, aspects of *agon* and *alea* are also embodied in *tat* in a complementary fashion. *Agon*, in terms of the effort required by both micro-worlds: the person who is homeless has to take care of the object throughout the night in as much as the passer-by has to do the same during the day. *Alea* is instead expressed in terms of the chance of using the object in twofold aspects. Firstly, at least at the preliminary stage, chance is related to scarcity and the object's availability within the Portico area. On the one hand this aspect of chance may leave the situation open to conflict; on the other this characteristic is part of the established, and shared, rules of the game. Secondly, chance is also embodied by the object in terms of an investigative tool and its capacity of provoking curiosity in the use and exploration of the object itself. In this respect the object is dynamic. It can be at the same time a city bench and a mattress, problematising the multifold way in which the space of the portico is used. It invites individuals to use the object in a variety of ways.

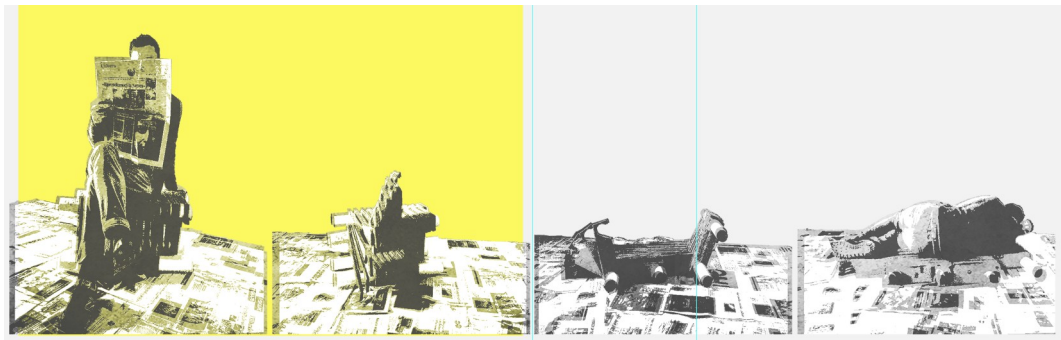


Illustration 12: Functioning mechanism

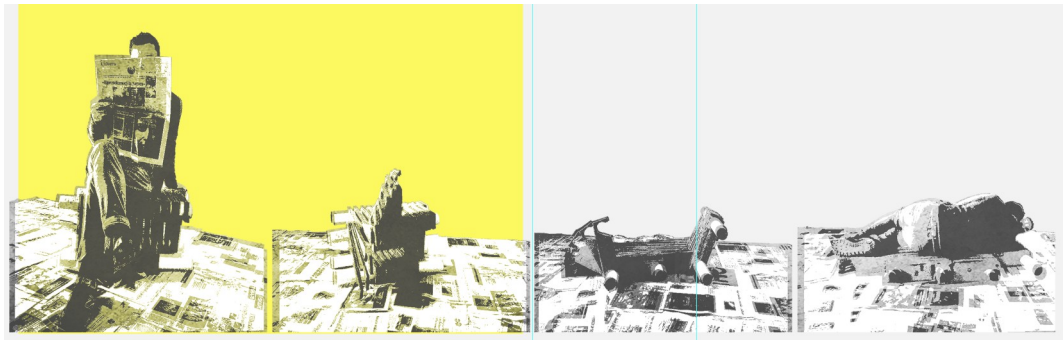


Illustration 49: Functioning mechanism

Its design is due to the foetal position adopted by rough sleepers when sleeping (Chapter 1), which makes the bench acquire a strange shape; it is not a familiar bench. In this respect  $\Delta$ It aims to provoke curiosity, possessing the quality of a *technological probe*<sup>317</sup>: it is left in place in order to study how the collective will appropriate that technology in an everyday life use.  $\Delta$ It's use indeed may go beyond the one that was planned during the design phase. A taste of this aspect was already experimented on with the second provotype. In fact, when the object was taken to the house of a friend of mine who helped me to laser-cut the pieces, his two children were asking what the object was. Rather than providing an explanation I preferred to ask the children what they thought the object was and they started playing with it. One of the two went through the hole in the centre, trying to hide himself from his brother who was trying to catch him from above.

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317 De Boer, Laurens and Donovan, Jared, "Provotypes for Participatory Innovation."





Illustration 50: Kids exploring the object

The same happened when the object was presented to the community of people who are rough sleepers in St Peter's Square. Although, they seemed to be enthusiastic about the project, they were not sure how the object functioned nor how to use it. Therefore it was left to me to explain how it functioned. Their criticism concerned two aspects: one, that the object was too short. Effectively, the first prototype was designed according to my height while adopting the foetal position whereas the majority of people who inhabit the portico are taller than me. Two, they requested the possibility of having a “double-bed” version of the object. In fact, in the second chapter it was reported how often people who

inhabit the portico to sleep in pairs, overcoming the boundary of sexual orientation. After having explained to them the project's aims - to improve the quality of the relationship between passers-by and the community of rough sleepers and how this could be beneficial for them - the community agreed that they would have put in all the necessary effort to take care of the object.



Illustration 51: Object's presentation to the community of rough sleepers in St Peter's Square

#### 8.4.1 A Missed Opportunity?

However, the development of tAI was arrested. It would have required a third component to be fully developed and properly tested in space, the support from institutional bodies, i.e. Rome City Council and the Vatican City. I managed to schedule meetings with both Mrs. Michela Micheli<sup>318</sup> from Rome City Council and Archbishop Konrad Krajewski, the Papal Almoner.<sup>319</sup> In particular, I was

<sup>318</sup> Mrs Michela Micheli is one of the directors in charge of the Dipartimento delle Politiche Sociali, Sussidiarietà e Salute (Literally Department of Social Politics, Subsidiarity and Welfare) of Rome City Council. She leads the "Emergency and Social Inclusion Unit" within the Department.

<sup>319</sup> In particular the main idea behind the project developed with the community of homeless people in St Peter's Square involved the possibility of involving directly the community in the production of the object. This would have implied Rome City Council to activate an institutional protocol with regards to cardboard collection and recycling. The Vatican City should have furnished a small space to be used as a workshop for the production of the objects. Finally, charitable bodies (I have personally engaged *Caritas*, *Cotrad* and *Il Cigno*) would have provided the presence of volunteers to help the homeless people carrying out the work.

moved by the strong belief that without the support of institutional partners, the project could have been regarded as a protest action like those critically reviewed in this thesis. Nonetheless, as reported in Chapter 2, these meetings were unsuccessful and made divergent opinions emerge. In other words, in the attempt to explain a project that aims to overcome the binary tension between poles, I found myself being on one side of two alternative positions. Perhaps, this is also part of precarity but I prefer to leave the development of this final comment for the Coda Chapter. However, a series of reflections can be emphasised in the conclusion of this chapter.



Illustration 52: The first object left in St Peter's Square (next to indifferent passers-by)



## 8.5 Redefining Mediation through Use

This chapter unveiled tAI's main features, arguing how these attempt to blur sociocultural boundaries present in the portico area in St Peter's Square. The main proposal has been to turn dialectical and hegemonic relationships into an agonistic game. This is based on both chance and merit. The first aspect to remark on concerns the notion of feedback and how this relates to the object. It seems self-explanatory that feedback is expressed in the use of tAI as both a city bench and as a mattress. This is the first feedback each person who is using the object can get. However the object also stresses the notion of feedback to function in terms of feedforward. In this respect the object prescribes a series of rules that have to be respected by each person utilising the object. These are made explicit for the passer-by while tacitly agreed with by the community of people who are homeless. Additionally, the use of digital contents embedded in the object and accessible through the internet aims to unveil aspects concerning the life of the community of people who are homeless in St Peter's Square. In other words, these contents attempt to provoke epiphanies in passers-by like those that have been described in Chapter 2. The aim of digital contents is also to involve individuals, calling them to act and advertise the project and its rationale through digital channels. In other words, individuals are asked to make the object and its aims public, forming a network of involved actors.

In chapter 1, the object was described as having the aim of activating a form of remote dialogue between the community of homeless people and passers-by. This aspect has been voluntarily left until this last section. The use of feedforward implies that in its double functionality, the object embodies traces of the previous practice. tAI is in the space of the portico because another previous and remote user, by using it responsibly, is allowing other individuals to use the object. This aspect at a first level of analysis recalls the idea of the portico area that is cleaned up every morning. This was described as a way to render the space a neutral ground for the appropriation of it by a contingency of practices. In other words, the space of the portico may be said to be precarious and fragile. It requires the effort of the people who are inhabiting it to take care of the space. In so doing, the community of homeless people grant the right to access and enjoy the space to

other individuals. However, when this aspect is framed into the object and particularly referring to its quality as a precarious object made out of recycled cardboard, this requires some reflection on the notion of mediation.

In Chapter 4 mediation and intermediation were examined through the account provided by philosopher Michel Serres and related commentators.<sup>320</sup> In particular, as the graph shows, a parasitic cascade involves a sequential series of relationships. They are parasitic in the sense that each relation relates to the previous one. However, the parasitic cascade also implies that each relation can be interrupted by the one that follows.

Chapter 4 proposed that the relationship between people who are homeless and public space is parasitic. These individuals parasite public space. However, their relation to space is interrupted by public authorities, i.e. Nottingham City Council's anti-homeless political tools or policemen moving away homeless people from the portico in St Peter's Square. For instance, in the example of Nottingham, the new relationship established between Nottingham City Council's action and homeless people was again interrupted by the protest action performed by FightBack. The main aspect to emphasise of Serres' parasitic cascade is that, as described in the second interpretative illustration, within the cascade the centre moves away. It changes constantly. At the beginning of the cascade, the centre is the relationship between homeless people and public space. The interruption provoked by Nottingham City Council moves the centre, which becomes the anti-homeless regulatory policy. Finally, the centre becomes the protest occupation of a public ground performed by a group of activists together with 26 homeless people. In all these passages, the initial centre - the relationship between homeless people and public space, intending this as the contribution of homeless people and the rest of the general public in the construction of public space, is lost. It has become first a contrast between institutional bodies, representative of Nottingham city-dwellers and homeless people and then between these first and a group of protesters. The same applies to Transgressive

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320 Serres and Schehr, *The Parasite / Michel Serres ; Translated, with Notes, by Lawrence R. Schehr*; Brown, "Michel Serres : Science, Translation and the Logic of the Parasite (English)"; Crocker, "Noises and Exceptions: Pure Mediality in Serres and Agamben"; Brown, "Serres and Mediation."

Architecture's *Bed Sheet Project*. Due to the fact the intervention was only aimed at raising awareness of the presence of rough sleepers in London, the project turned itself into a protest against London Urban Task Force and anti-homeless policies.

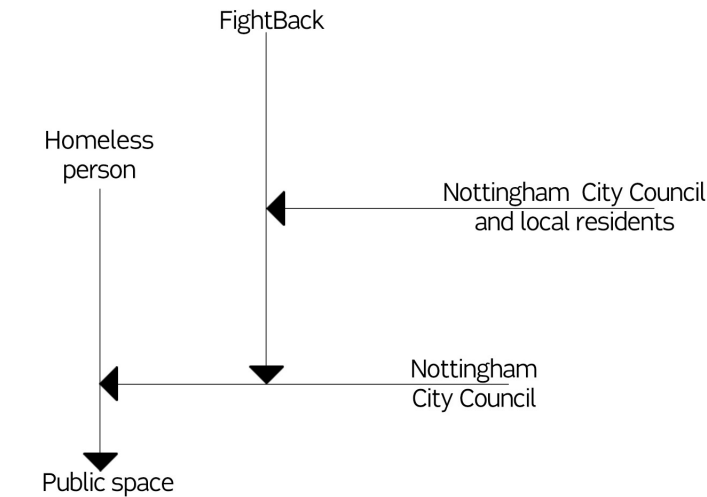


Illustration 53: Scheme of the parasitic cascade

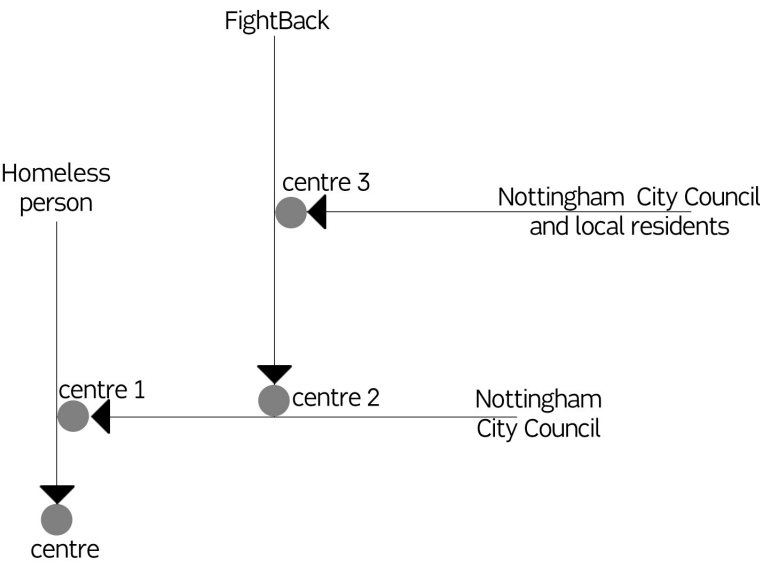


Illustration 54: Second scheme of the parasitic cascade

By contrast, the notion of mediation applied in the project I developed in Rome is different. As explained in Chapter 1, I was inspired by Italian philosopher Agamben's notion of *chresthai*. This is a Greek word that can be translated as utilisation. As Agamben intends this word within the logic of mediation: “ the relation that one has with him/herself; the affection which is received by being in a relation with a certain entity.”<sup>321</sup> Mediation therefore is not parasitic but is manifested through the use of the object I designed by diverse subjects. In other words, both the object and its user are the mediators. This can be grasped by the third diagram, which illustrates where  $\tau\Delta$ It places itself in terms of mediated and mediating relationship. The diagram I elaborated shows the first two elements of the parasitic cascade: the homeless person parasiting public space and the interruption of this relation by a second component, i.e. homeless people have to be moved away from public space. Both these relations however establish their own centre.  $\tau\Delta$ It is placed in between these two centres, troubling the relationship between them. With this in mind it is possible to understand the meaning of what was previously described as the capacity of the object to embody traces of the previous practice. However, in order to function as a mediating element,  $\tau\Delta$ It requires the effort of its user. By using the object, each user becomes part of this form of mediation, while by respecting the prescribed set of rules, i.e. the feedforward aforementioned, the user allows a remote other to enjoy and use the object in a future moment. In so doing, a remote form of mutual cooperation and dialogue is manufactured: one where individuals together construct public space.

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321 Agamben, *L'uso Dei Corpi. Homo Sacer*, IV, 2. o. 53

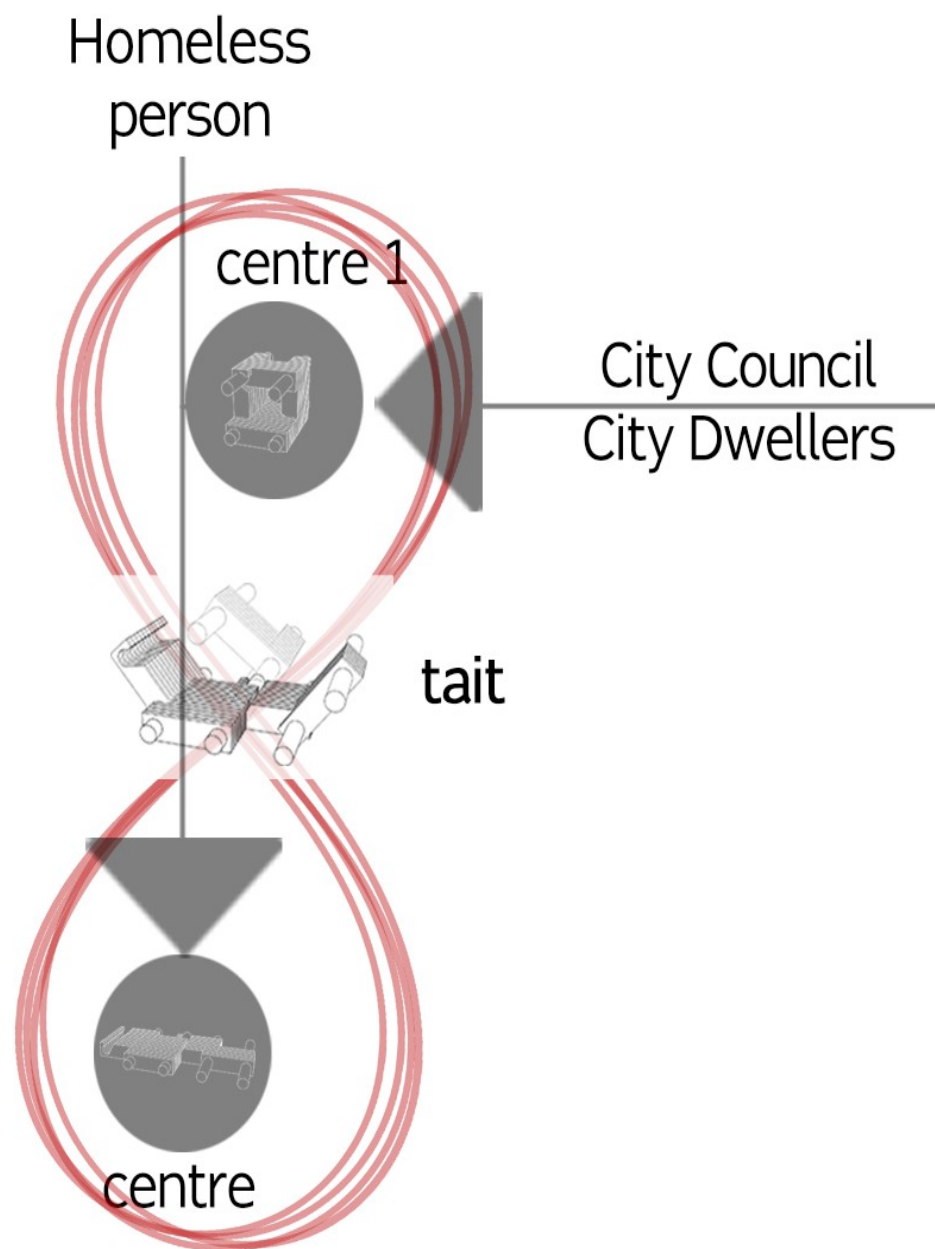


Illustration 55: Mediation through tait

## 8.6 Summary: Towards a more Ecological Construction of Public Space

Finally, in conclusion of this chapter, the development of tAt suggests the possibility that design can play in defining more decentralised and ecological understanding of the construction of public space: many individuals acting as an ecology in the construction of public space and overcoming the common definition of it as the result of people's actions.<sup>322</sup> This ecological intending inherent in the construction of public space is based on a serious form of agonistic game. Ecology however calls individuals to develop a sense of responsibility towards the other. As maintained in Chapter 3, scholar in social anthropology Athena Athanasiou and philosopher Judith Butler define this aspect as *dispossession*: exposure and disposition to others. This thesis agrees Athanasiou and Butler's assertion that "disposition – with all its implications of affective engagement, address, risk, excitement, exposure and unpredictability – is what brings performativity and precarity together."<sup>323</sup> In this respect, the project I developed suggests that the public is neither an ambiguous heterogeneity of people, nor a series of individualities. Rather the public is an ecology of individual subjects and the construction of public space requires effort through the contribution that each involved individual offers, expressed in the form of public actions and practices. The resulting public space is constructed through collective effort and as a disposition to a remote other.

However, it should be pointed out that the context in which this experimentation took place presented several features that allowed or permitted the development of the object as described in this chapter: the multifold way in which the portico is utilised and shared; the presence of stable sociocultural boundaries; a pattern of alternative practices in space; and the effort on the side of homeless people to make the space accessible for the rest of passers-by. These conditions made the space of the portico a fertile area for this type of project and the development of it in terms of possible decentralisation of social inclusion. The

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<sup>322</sup> In this respect, an account of this type of organisation can be grasped by looking at the article Explaining Bitcoins like I am five findable at <https://medium.com/@nik5ter/explain-bitcoin-like-im-five-73b4257ac833>. For a more provocative interpretation of blockchain, I would suggest the hacker group Telecomix's manifesto at <http://telecomix.org/aleph.html>

<sup>323</sup> Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. p. 105

presence of these aspects appears therefore to have contributed substantially, raising the question of whether the eventual non-presence of them may in any case produce similar outcomes. Ultimately, this project suggests that social inclusion may be decentralised through innovation in practice. In particular, with regards to homelessness, this may result in more proactive and empowering activities for individuals who face homelessness.





## *9 (H)acknowledgements for Architecture*

In this last and concluding chapter, I will discuss some of the aspects that have emerged from the analysis of the topics developed throughout the thesis. These have to be intended as (h)acknowledgements for architecture. In this respect it is possible to reveal the inclusion of the letter “h” in the word acknowledgement. Effectively, as stated throughout the thesis, they are inspired by Bernard Tschumi's advertisement for architecture. During the interviews I had with him in Paris, we discussed the idea of advertisement. However, I offered the opinion that it is no longer time to advertise architecture but rather to stress some acknowledgement. Acknowledgements in this respect recall Tschumi's use of advertisements. They should be intended as a way to advertise, that is to make public and knowable the concepts and arguments developed in this thesis. However, the introduction of the letter “h” entails the double possibility that these may hack architectural concepts and practices and act as invitations to be hacked. The following arguments therefore are intended for a range of scholars operating within the field of humanities and social science, who nourish an interest for questions concerning architecture.

#### **9.1.1 Transgression is an Obsolete Concept (to promote social interaction among diverse actors in space)**

The first argument deals with the difference between transgressive and profanatory practices. This thesis can be regarded as a defence of profanation rather than transgression. During the several meetings with both of my supervisors Prof. Richard Coyne and Prof. Chris Speed, we often discussed this topic within the realm of architectural interventions. In architectural design and theory, the notion of transgression has been associated with the possibility of suggesting new forms of communication between architectural space and users.<sup>324</sup> These forms of communication have been translated in the architectural realm through the idea that transgressive architectural interventions could have provoked new and unexpected users' actions and behaviours in space.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Hays, *Architecture Theory Since 1968*.

<sup>325</sup> Tschumi, *Architecture Concepts : Red Is Not a Color / Bernard Tschumi*. See also: Eisenman, *Written into the Void : Selected Writings, 1990-2004 / Peter Eisenman ; with an Introduction by Jeffrey Kipnis*.

Bernard Tschumi, one of the main architectural sources in this thesis, has elaborated the possibility of applying the notion of transgression to architecture throughout his work, both theoretical and practical. He asserts that the idea of transgression applied to the design of architectural spaces is aimed at establishing a form of communication with architectural users. In this respect, according to Tschumi, when transgression is inherent in space "architecture ceases to be a backdrop for actions, becoming the action itself. All this suggests that "shock" must be manufactured by the architect if architecture is to communicate."<sup>326</sup> Richard Coyne elaborates the argument about transgression, suggesting that exaggeration can be able to produce particular atmospheres and moods in architectural users. In other words, exaggeration is deployed by architects in order to produce an effect on the person who is experiencing architectural space. He writes:

*Architecture has masterly control over exaggeration. Human inhabitants are accustomed to orthogonality, a world of right angles. In the visual field these angles and lines appear to converge according to the conventions of perspective. Exaggerating and distorting these vectors certainly produces an effect on the person negotiating such spaces, or perhaps a particular atmosphere or mood.*<sup>327</sup>

This seems to suggest that through the manufacturing of particular atmospheres and moods, i.e. shock, architectural space can nourish and favour new and transgressive practices which break with the "customary good intentions of architecture." However, this doctoral research defends the thesis that the use of the notion of transgression to inform architectural interventions fails to induce sociocultural changes. The idea that through exaggeration, architectural spaces may nourish different patterns of behaviours and actions in space seems not to work with issues concerning civic coexistence in public space, i.e. homeless people and the relationship with both public space and the general public. In fact, in the proceeding of the conference *Architecture of Alterity* I asserted that transgression, with regards to the project I carried out in Rome, was perhaps not the correct term to describe its aims and functioning. Indeed,

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<sup>326</sup> Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* / Bernard Tschumi.

<sup>327</sup> From Richard Coyne's blog *Reflections on Digital Media & Culture: Exaggeration*.  
<http://richardcoyne.com/2012/04/28/exaggeration-2/>

transgression was in my opinion a term which should no longer be used in architecture. Not anymore.

French philosopher Georges Bataille elaborates the concept of transgression, stating that it “opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but [that] it maintains these limits just the same. Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it.”<sup>328</sup> Transgression, according to Bataille, is a form of overcoming boundaries. However, it touches the profane world, or what is not regarded as customary, without being entirely profane. Transgression exceeds limits fixed by customary behaviours without destroying them. Conversely, it is possible to argue that the definition provided by Bataille seems to imply that transgression may be susceptible to becoming a custom; that is, the boundary that constrains customs and customary actions and behaviours through transgression is expanded and re-parametrised at the risk of becoming institutionalised.

In popular culture an aspect of the institutionalisation of transgression, although not explicitly mentioned, may be seen within a speech delivered by the character Top Dollar in the 1994 movie *The Crow*.<sup>329</sup> Top Dollar, the main villain, is leading a meeting before the Devil's Night, when all gangsters light fires across the city in order to make profit from the consequent process of building reconstruction. He complains because he is frustrated; the Devil's Night has become institutionalised. He says:

*A man has an idea. The [transgressive] idea attracts others, like-minded. The idea expands. The idea becomes an institution [...] I started the first fire in this goddamn city. Before I knew it, every charlatan and shitheel was imitating me. You know what they got now? Devil's Night greeting cards. Isn't that precious? The idea has become the institution.*<sup>330</sup>

The other gangsters question him regarding whether he wants to continue burning fires across the city or not and he replies to them “no, I want you to set a fire so goddamn big, the gods'll notice us again, that's what I'm sayin’.”

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328 Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. p. 67

329 Starring in the movie also Brandon Lee. *The Crow* gained notoriety also because it was the last movie where Lee played before his premature death.

330 The transcript of the movie can be found here: <http://crowsattic.tripod.com/CrowTranscript.txt>

To frame Top Dollar's speech within the reasoning concerning the relationship between exaggeration and transgression, what seems to be inherent in transgression is that it either becomes customary and institutionalised or, in order to remain transgressive, it needs to be transformed, to continuously exceed itself and become exaggerated. This aspect can be compared with what was argued in Chapter 3 concerning tolerance. Tolerance as much as transgression functions as an elastic frame, which seems to outline a propensity of being transgressed. However, as argued in that chapter, there is a limit to tolerance.

In fact, the idea of tolerance framed within the notion of transgression may be referred to an urban practice, i.e. homelessness that continuously stresses the boundaries of tolerance towards the other up to the point in which, by virtue of exaggeration, it becomes intolerable. In other words, the risk inherent in celebrating certain practices i.e. homelessness, through architectural interventions regarded as transgressive projects, may be the one of emphasising social, cultural and economic contrasts. During this research, my informants often questioned me about the importance I was giving to homeless people. They asked me a legitimate question to which, however, I have not been able to give any answer: why would a homeless person deserve more attention than a single mother with children, who works, cannot afford to buy a house and is forced to live at her parent's house?

The other side inherent in transgression is institutionalisation. This implies that if the practice is not exaggerated enough, it becomes customary. Chapter 3 highlighted this aspect by reviewing the notion of resilient citizen: one who lives constantly in a state of permanent crisis and becomes accustomed to it. This involves a process of neutralisation of sociocultural differences in space which recalls the one described by Herbert Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*:

*The stabilizing tendencies conflict with the subversive elements of Reason, the power of positive with that of negative thinking, until the achievements of advanced industrial civilization lead to the triumph of the one-dimensional reality over all contradictions.*<sup>331</sup>

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331 Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. p. 128

In *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*, Awan, Schneider and Till comment on this aspect regarding the interview that John Goodbun and David Cunningham had with Rem Koolhaas. The interview concerned globalisation and the possible impact that the erasure of differences may have in architecture. Koolhaas' reply in this respect was: "our position is that, once unleashed, whether you want it or not, (globalisation) is what is 'normal', so you have to inscribe yourself within it rather than try to work against it or to stop it."<sup>332</sup> Awan, Schneider and Till's position with regards to Koolhaas' claim concerned the fact that he was unwittingly admitting that the presence of different sociocultural spheres in space was "normal" and normalised. Koolhaas in other words was celebrating diversities, including social inequalities such as urban poverty, as acceptable. In fact, Koolhaas points out that one should neither work against this condition nor stop it, but rather accepts it. However, according to Awan, Schneider and Till by accepting the presence of different practices in space as normal, the architect was not accepting the challenge of working with diversities. In other words, as discussed in Chapter 4, architects often celebrate the heterogeneity of practices in space. However, in so doing the challenge offered by the presence of diverse practices in space is neutralised in favour of a *status quo*. Rather, as I maintained throughout this research study, the attempt should be to work with diversities, making these coexist and cooperate in the construction of space as I attempted to achieve with the project in St Peter's Square.

Therefore this research thesis defends the hypothesis that it is by looking and understanding concepts such as profanation and profanatory practices that it is possible to promote sociocultural changes in the use and appropriation of space by a contingency of diverse actors. The aspect of profanation, as showed in Chapter 6, should entail a reworking of the concept of mediation as a possible way to turn dialectical and hegemonic relationships into agonistic practices.

Agonistic practices have been addressed in Chapter 8 through the analysis of the object I designed. In particular, they are aimed at turning a hegemonic set of relationships into a game where different practices are not in contrast. Rather,

<sup>332</sup> Awan, Schneider, and Till, *Spatial Agency : Other Ways of Doing Architecture* / Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, Jeremy Till. p. 39

they run parallel to one another with  $\tau\Delta\text{It}$  as a mediating device capable of finding points of intersection between the boundaries established by each practice. Hence, it is possible to assert that while for instance the tidying up of the portico area remains mostly hidden to the general public,  $\tau\Delta\text{It}$  aims to make this practice public and knowable in space. In other words,  $\tau\Delta\text{It}$  does not aim to highlight homelessness as a transgressive practice, but rather as profanatory (Chapter 6). Profanation works against the process of separation of a practice into distinct spheres, dislocating the lines that keep it separated and constrained from other practices.<sup>333</sup> The object in fact by bringing hidden practices carried out by the community of homeless people to light, aims to blur the boundaries that keep these practices separate and make them public. In other words,  $\tau\Delta\text{It}$  operates a profanation of the practices carried out underneath the portico area, freeing them from their customary constraints.

Ultimately, this reasoning should be regarded as an invitation to reflect upon the difference between transgression and profanation in the context of architectural practices. This thesis has defended the idea that the use of the concept of profanation together with a renewed notion of mediation expressed through the use of a designed object attempts to nourish a sense of civic coexistence in space. This implies that the exercise of practices that lay in hegemonic relationships between one another becomes instead an agonistic game.

### 9.1.2 Producing Novelty: Moving Beyond Alternative Events

The argument developed above concerning profanation and transgression introduces the second (h)acknowledgement for architecture. The concept elaborated above with regard to the relationship between architectural spaces and the notion of transgression underlies a series of considerations concerning the notion of event and the production of novelty. In fact, the idea that architectural space may affect architectural users, producing a certain atmosphere or mood, admits the possibility that architectural space may be deemed as an event producer by being itself an event. Therefore, in the context outlined by this

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<sup>333</sup> Agamben, *Il Sacramento Del Linguaggio: Archeologia Del Giuramento (Homo Sacer II, 3)*.

doctoral thesis it seems plausible to suggest that the concept of event, elaborated in Chapter 2 as epiphanies, should be linked with the one elaborated in Chapter 4 involving philosopher Alain Badiou's notion of event as a claim of inclusion and belonging to a state of affairs.

The analysis of the literature concerning the discussion of the concept of event made diverging positions between Badiou and Gilles Deleuze's elaboration of the concept, emerge. Although this thesis has not addressed this topic extensively in the development of the chapters, the notion of event has been, to borrow an expression used in Chapter 3, haunting this work from the background. In fact, the notion of event was addressed in Chapter 2 and was based on the account of events as epiphanies provided by French philosopher Françoise Dastur, which seems to share similarities with Deleuze's idea of event.

By contrast Badiou's notion of event is different from Deleuze's one. As explained in Chapter 5, the event for Badiou is based on two components: belonging and inclusion. Williams points out that "this means that the subjects must bridge between the world they belong to, or are a set of presented elements of, and the world they move towards, one determined by the event that cannot be presented in the first, yet one that directs the actions of the subjects designed to bring about the second."<sup>334</sup> The event occurs in the very rare case in which a singularity (what belongs to a state of affairs without being included) is turned into normal (something that both belongs to and is included in a state of affairs).<sup>335</sup> In the context of this thesis, the description of the protest action carried out by FightBack in Nottingham can be intended as a form of event that recalls Badiou's definition. Hence, the group of activists was protesting against Nottingham City Council, demanding to house a group of 26 homeless individuals. These in other words were not included while belonging to the city. The fact that these homeless people were then housed, implies that a situation regarded as a singularity was turned into normal. However, it is possible to highlight that while events for Deleuze concern the individual, for Badiou they

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<sup>334</sup> Williams, "If Not Here, Then Where? On the Location and Individuation of Events in Badiou and Deleuze." p. 113

<sup>335</sup> Hallward and Badiou, *Badiou : A Subject to Truth* / Peter Hallward ; Foreword by Slavoj Žižek.



involve collective actions. James Williams, commenting on Badiou's event contends that "all this activity is not performed by individual human subjects but is rather understood better as the work of a collective political subject or grouping."<sup>336</sup> In this respect, it is possible to propose a possible new way of interpreting both the two notions of event, intending these in ecological terms.

This implies considering the event neither as something which affects the individual nor as a collective action. In other words, the production of novelty does not depend on individuals' contributions, e.g. the architect who designs a pop-up shelter for homeless people, nor does it depend on collective actions, e.g. the activists who claim all the people should be housed. In particular, this twofold aspect recalls de Waal's account elaborated in Chapter 1, 3 and 8 concerning the city intended as both individualistic and communitarian.<sup>337</sup> Conversely, the project developed for and with the community of homeless people in Rome seems to suggest a notion of event based on the idea that each differential contribution to a subject may move him/her towards the construction of a collective of involved individuals. This ecological intending inherent in the construction of public space as explained in Chapter 6 is based on a form of game. This is not comic but serious as much as the notion of parody elaborated in Chapter 4. Ecology however calls individuals to develop a sense of responsibility towards the other. Scholar in social anthropology Athena Athanasiou and philosopher Judith Butler define this aspect as dispossession: exposure and disposition to others.<sup>338</sup>

The two scholars assert that "disposition – with all its implications of affective engagement, address, risk, excitement, exposure and unpredictability – is what brings performativity and precarity together."<sup>339</sup> This thesis therefore should be regarded as an invitation to consider the production of novelty through an ecological understatement of the notion of event. In this respect, the project I developed suggests that the public is neither an ambiguous heterogeneity of people, nor a series of individualities. Rather the public is an

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<sup>336</sup> Williams, "If Not Here, Then Where? On the Location and Individuation of Events in Badiou and Deleuze." p. 104

<sup>337</sup> de Waal, *The City as Interface: How Digital Media Are Changing the City*.

<sup>338</sup> Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid. p. 104

ecology of individual subjects and the construction of public space requires effort. Through the contribution that each involved individual offers, expressed in form of public actions and practices, the resulting public space is constructed through collective effort and as a disposition to a remote other.

### 9.1.3 (Escape) from Reality to Precarity

The final acknowledgement for architecture entails a reflection on precarity. Chapter 8 discussed how the development of the project in Rome was arrested. This was due to the fact that the third component i.e. institutional bodies, did not manifest an interest in being involved in the project. The decision to stop the development of the project may be deemed itself precarious. The decision to interrupt the development of the project was based on the strong belief that without the contribution of institutional bodies the project would have been in contrast with the principles upon which it is based. In Chapter 8 I outlined how while presenting the project, I found myself occupying the position of one of two poles alternative to one another. However, there are two distinct hypotheses. One, the development of the project can be started again at any time: perhaps through a post-doctoral research work. The second hypothesis implies a reflection on the decision to leave this project incomplete. This in my opinion places the entire research thesis into precarity.

This last reasoning recalls the action undertaken by Kurt Russell in the final scene of the movie *Escape from L.A.*<sup>340</sup> The movie is set in a future, fictional United States of America where the new president has declared it to be a land of moral superiority: no smoking, no red meat, no freedom of religion and no unapproved marriages. United States citizens who transgress the laws are deported to the island of Los Angeles. Hence, a massive earthquake that hit Los Angeles caused the destruction of the city and its separation from the mainland. The island is led by revolutionary Cuervo Jones, who manages to steal an electromagnetic weapon capable of rendering all electronic devices on the planet useless. Through the use of this weapon, Jones is determined to take back America with the assistance of an allied invasion force of “third world” nations. Kurt Russell, who plays the

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<sup>340</sup> Carpenter, *Escape from L.A.*

character known as Snake Plissken, is sent to Los Angeles on a mission to rescue the device. Although he manages to take the device back to America and defeat Cuervo Jones, Snake Plissken does not complete the mission. On his return to America, he does not give the weapon back to the President. Surrounded by presidential security guards he declares: “shut down the third world, they lose you win. If I shut down America, you lose they win. The more things change, the more they stay the same.” Then he inputs the world code on the weapon and shuts down the entire planet. In this way he has neither favoured America nor “third world” nations. Rather, by shutting down the planet he throws Earth into precarity.

The most obvious comparison between Snake Plissken's decision not to favour any side and the project I carried out is that  $\tau$ It is neither designed for homeless people nor for passers-by. It is for both. In other words, this research work should be intended as an invitation to practitioners to reason upon the idea that sociocultural changes may be verified by designing precarity. This requires us to look at everyday reality as composed of a contingency of alterity, assuming this as a precarious and ever-changing condition. In Chapter 3, it was discussed how the danger when looking at alterity may be to fictionalise the other, projecting one's own personal desire and fantasies. Rather, alterity should be regarded as a medium.<sup>341</sup> This concept was then developed and applied in the object I designed.

However, Snake Plissken's decision to leave the mission incomplete and shut down the planet may be also intended in terms of personal choice. In this respect, I personally decided not to force the development of the project. In other words, I shut it down. In so doing, the theoretical underpinnings and the reflections developed throughout this thesis have remained open. It has remained theoretical.  $\tau$ It could work or it could be a complete failure. Would it really matter? Ultimately, the fact that I have not completed the project, leaving somehow the question open, is an invitation to others to test the validity of the theory behind this precarious research work. Perhaps, this is also the end.

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<sup>341</sup> Wexler, “Alterity.” See also the idea of dealing with specters elaborated in Chapter 2 according to Susanetti's account, Susanetti, *Atene post-occidentale : spettri antichi per la democrazia contemporanea*.



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